1055

DIURNAL EVENTS.

A NOVEL.

Printed by J. Darling, Leadenhall-Street, London.

THE TANJORE MAHARAJA SERFOJI'S SARASWATI MAHAL.
1055

DIURNAL EVENTS;

OR THE

Antipodes to Romance.

A Novel.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

BY THE AUTHOR OF THE SAILOR AND SOLDIER BOY.

Hail, Social Life! into thy pleasing bounds
Again I come, to pay the common stock
My share of service, and, in glad return,
To taste thy comforts, thy protected joys. THOMSON.

VOL. IV.

London:
Printed at the Minerva Press for
A. K. NEWMAN AND CO. LEADENHALL-STREET.
1816.

DIURNAL EVENTS.

Sirfojee Rajah. 1827

CHAPTER I.

To Caroline the days now fled rapidly, and the one which was to celebrate the birthday of the heir of Alborough rapidly approached.

Elinor's spirits also became more even, and her sister remarked she was no longer subject to those fits of absence which had often drawn forth her raillery. A letter from lady Ormsby, in answer to the one Elinor had written, now arrived; in which she said, none had been received from abroad, except that her father had entrusted to sir Henry

Longbourne when he met him at ——. Emma also added, it was very uncertain whether they should hear again till the general returned to England, whither her mother was certain Alfred also would accompany him.

Elinor's heart fluttered as she perused this part of her friend's epistle; but resolutely determining to banish the subject from her mind, she carefully secured the letter in her desk, and resolved upon not looking at it, or thinking of its contents again: but although she could not exactly attain this resolution, her efforts were not without success; and had not Caroline, by some oblique reference or remark, recalled the subject to her mind, Elinor thought she could have completely succeeded in her endeavours. From her mother also she frequently heard; and having informed her she had guessed the reason her father had for wishing to receive such frequent accounts of Caroline, Mrs. Belvington, in reply,

reply, candidly acknowledged her opinion was a correct one, and again earnestly entreated she would watch over her sister, and communicate, in her usual succinct style, every little anecdote relative to the latter, and the manner in which she received the attentions of Mr. Egerton or any other gentleman; and Elinor answered her mother she had every reason to believe Caroline's esteem and high respect for Mr. Egerton were fast ripening into love. "He is though, I can perceive," she continued, in a letter she wrote her mother the day preceding the *fête*, "in great alarm lest his nephew, sir Henry Longbourne, or Arthur Campbell (who, with several others of our party, appear as much attracted as himself by Caroline's artless, fascinating manners), should attain that place in her heart he so ardently aspires to. But her manner towards them is too gay and unconstrained for him to entertain any reasonable fear of such

being at present likely to happen; and though I believe he cannot, unfortunately for himself, think with me, yet still his conduct, could you and my father be witnesses of it, would command your warmest approbation. He seeks not to withdraw Caroline from the society of his rivals, though it is evident he endures this restraint with reluctance, if not with torture. 'Are you sure your sister is only fifteen?' he frequently asks me, after he returns with her from their morning's ride or ramble; 'the sentiments she expresses are more like those we expect to hear from a woman ten years her senior.' I sometimes venture to reply—'I am pretty certain she is not my senior at least;' but will inform you of his opinion, and inquire if it was a correct one: therefore, my dear mother, beg of my father to consult either his parish register or our great Family Bible, and inform us whether we may not add three years at least

to

to fifteen. Such, I am certain, would be your opinion, my dear mother, could you see your child by the side of Maria Davenport, who is, as she repeatedly informs her uncle Charles, only six months younger. Poor Caroline now acknowledges she gives up all hope of ever seeing her *protégée* a rational companion. All her most assiduous efforts have proved unsuccessful, and never will Maria attain any excellence, except at trap-ball and other similar amusements, in which my sister has ever been her ready companion, in the vain hope of attaching and persuading her, when tired of these, to join in some more rational occupation; but Maria is not otherwise to be entertained, neither has she a heart to attach; and this, I fear, even poor Mrs. Davenport's partiality as a mother will but too soon discover. You have frequently seen how our dear Caroline can for hours blend entertainment with instruction, when conversing with her fa-

vourite niece Henrietta, who ever appears to gain some additional idea by her aunt's conversation; but now her each succeeding attempt only adds to the yawning vacancy of Maria's countenance, and the only inquiry or request she makes during the time is, "Now, will you go and play at trap-ball?" Mr. Egerton's patience is quite exhausted, and he has more than once requested Caroline to leave his niece to her incorrigible ignorance; but she is unwilling to hurt Mrs. Davenport, therefore still toils on, without the consolation of hoping her efforts will be crowned with success."

Elinor did not proceed to inform her mother George Fitzmorton fancied himself more desperately in love with her than ever, and that he would scarcely allow her to address a remark to any other gentleman but himself. This ridiculous conduct sometimes provoked her, but she oftener felt inclined to

laugh,

laugh, and ever joined in the raillery which her young companions daily exercised against her.

It was on the same day, and soon after she had finished the foregoing letter to her mother, that Elinor was joined by George in the garden, where she was alone (Caroline and the rest of the party being out, as usual, on their morning's excursion), and after making many inquiries concerning her family and the manner in which she had spent the summer, he suddenly exclaimed—"Miss Belvington, on you alone it depends whether I remain a witness of to-morrow's gaieties or post off to my kind uncle's in Wiltshire.

"On me!" said Elinor, who now began to apprehend a repetition of the well-remembered scene in Mr. Montague's breakfast-parlour; "I cannot see how I alone have power to deprive you of so much pleasure."

"You are perfectly aware it does

rest entirely with yourself," he returned; "and whilst you retain that expressively-blushing complexion, attempt not to deceive me, for it will be in vain. Do not interrupt me," he continued, as Elinor, he saw, was on the point of doing; "do not interrupt me till I have inquired whether you remember the conversation that passed between us and general Clarenville on the morning I left Ashgrove?"

"Your memory did not appear so tenacious the morning I first saw you at S——."

"No," he eagerly exclaimed, "because I had understood, some time before, that you were engaged to major Mortimer, and I had then made up my mind on the subject; but now——"

"But now," interrupted Elinor, half-smiling, "you must fancy me still engaged, and let your mind rest in the same quiescent state; for I must equally now decline, as I should have done then,

then, listening to a renewal of our former conversation;" and Elinor was turning quickly into a walk that led to the house, but George, nettled at the cool, and, as he fancied, contemptuous manner in which she had answered him, yet remembering the distress his impetuous manner had occasioned her at Mr. Montague's, half-serious, half-laughing, returned, as he caught her arm, and drew it within his own—"But I must, as in the former conversation, decline being left so suddenly, at least till I have received an answer to one more question. Am I really and sincerely to consider you still as an engaged woman?"

"If that idea will prevent your dwelling longer upon this topic, I should wish you to think I am."

"Well, I will do so; only tell me who is the happy man? Is he my old formidable rival, Clarenville?"

"If you please," returned Elinor, now deeply blushing, "or any other you

consider equally formidable—Mr. Egerton, or his nephew sir Henry, will either of them answer the same purpose."

"No, no," replied George, still laughing, though his colour heightened as he observed her change of countenance, "I am not quite so blind but that I can perceive the eyes of these worthy gentlemen are solely directed towards your sister, and that my friend Clarenville's were as steadily fixed on the same bright star mine have so long been attracted by; and I likewise suspect he would not meet with such angry glances as I am now obliged to endure, whilst bringing this subject on the tapis."

"Think what you like—suspect what you please," returned Elinor, endeavouring, though vainly, to disengage her arm, "only do not weary me with your suspicions; but if you will not now change the conversation, I must insist upon returning to the house;" and Elinor throwing her disengaged arm around the bole

bole of a tree, prevented his attempt of hurrying her on further.

"Now then," cried George, tauntingly, "our friend the general could not accuse me of impetuosity without attaching the same censure to his favourite—his daughter, as I understand he even now calls you. Then since his claim to address you by that title will soon be indisputable, I will no longer intrude my more humble pretensions, or place myself in competition with his more fortunate son; but surely," he continued, as he passionately carried her hand to his lips, "this poor farewell even the happy Clarenville would not object to my taking once more—and God bless you!" Then again kissing her hand, George, darting down another walk, was quickly lost to the view of Elinor, who, angry with him, and no less so with herself, continued standing where he had left her, till aroused by the voice of lady Egerton tenderly inquiring the occasion of the

disturbance so visible in her countenance? Elinor, brushing away a tear of mortified pride and wounded delicacy, in an indignant tone replied—" That foolish boy, George Fitzmorton, is the cause of it:" the effort of speaking completely overset her forced composure, and she burst into tears.

Lady Egerton, alarmed and surprised at this violent agitation, earnestly entreated to be informed of what had passed; but Elinor could not for some moments reply: at length, in a voice almost suffocated by sobs, she exclaimed—" Oh! surely I am destined to receive every possible species of mortification from him: this is the second time he has thus overset me, and on the same account; had general Clarenville been here, George dared not thus have expressed himself:" and Elinor's tears again prevented her from speaking.

" One good effect, however," said lady Egerton smiling, " his nonsense has

produced—

produced—it has once again brought your guardian genius with pleasure to your remembrance; but, my dear Elinor, surely you will not allow any idle rattle this silly boy may have uttered thus to disturb your serenity! I can pretty well imagine what subject he has been conversing upon, and likewise suspect he has expressed his fears, no very unreasonable ones either, or without foundation, of our friend now abroad standing forth as a rival to his wishes. Am I not right in my suspicions?"

"Yes," returned Elinor, still weeping, "and his manner has indeed been most violent; but he has even proceeded farther, and——"

"And hinted his rival is a successful one," said lady Egerton smiling: "well, my love, why should so idle a suspicion, thrown out too at random, thus distress you? It is so stale a trick, so generally adopted by angry, disappointed, and boyish lovers like himself, that it is not worth

worth a moment's uneasiness. Exert yourself therefore, my dear Elinor, and suffer not such nonsense as this to disturb your spirit. I must not," she continued, throwing her veil over the head of Elinor as she spoke, "allow my brother to see these tears—see, he is now approaching; therefore, I pray you, banish all appearance of the tragic muse, if you wish to excite his admiration."

Elinor bent over a flowering shrub near her, as sir Charles joined them, who immediately addressing his sister, said —"I am sorry to inform you we have lost our young friend George; he has been obliged to leave us at a moment's notice; therefore I greatly fear matters are going on worse than ever at Fitzmorton Hall. Surely that family is a most unamiable one, George only excepted; but, Miss Belvington, you are acquainted, I understand, with the other members—is my opinion an uncharitable one?"

"The

"The Miss Fitzmortons are not very pleasant girls," replied Elinor, in as steady a voice as she could assume. "With the dowager lady Fitzmorton, though a guest under the same roof with herself nearly a fortnight, I have never exchanged half a dozen words; the late sir Charles was far from a pleasant man, and the present is still less so."

"Well, I am glad to find my judgment confirmed by so fair a lady," cheerfully replied the good old baronet; "but hark! I think I hear the voices of our young equestrians," he continued. "Yes, here comes your sister, bounding towards us with the grace and activity of a fawn."

Caroline soon joined them, and encouraged by sir Charles, with whom she was a great favourite, commenced a sportive account of her morning's excursion, in which she was soon joined by sir Henry Longbourne; and it was not until they had returned to the house, and the

sisters

sisters had retired to dress for dinner, that Caroline perceived something had occurred during her absence to disturb the tranquillity of Elinor; she now endeavoured to discover what it had been; but the latter, unable to bear her continued and repeated inquiries, begged her so earnestly to desist from them, that Caroline, though rather unwillingly, complied; and before they again retired to rest, had the satisfaction of seeing her sister's spirits resume their naturally-cheerful tone; Elinor having resolutely determined upon following lady Egerton's advice, of banishing the morning's unpleasant conversation from her mind as much as possible, and had thereby succeeded, apparently at least, in attaining her usual tranquillity.

CHAP-

CHAPTER II.

On the following morning all was bustle and hilarity at Alborough Hall; every face wore a cheerful aspect; and the bells of the village church rang a merry peal, as Elinor and Caroline, arm in arm, descended to the breakfast-parlour, in which the family were already assembled, and where the guests were contemplating with surprise the unusual animation visible in the countenance of him, to celebrate whose birthday they had been invited. Till this, the heir of Alborough had ever been the gravest of the party; now one of the sweetest smiles adorned his mouth, and delight reigned in every feature, as the sisters congratulated him upon the return of his natal day, and each, extending a hand, proceeded

proceeded to wish him many happy returns of it.

Elinor, though she blushed, as usual, whilst expressing these kind wishes, steadily raised her eyes to those of Mr. Egerton, nor started as Caroline did, when he raised hers and her sister's hand to his lips. "Ah!" thought Elinor, "could you, my dear sister, catch a glance of that blushing countenance in yonder glass, you would there see the damask rose predominate over the Provence." But she would not add to the confusion of her sister, whom sir Henry Longbourne now joined and led to the breakfast-table, whilst Mr. Egerton's eyes followed them to their station, and Caroline again blushed, as on turning round she read the expression they conveyed.

A dinner was given to the poor inhabitants of Alborough on the village-green, which sir Charles and his son, attended by several of their family and guests,

walked

walked to be spectators of. Caroline and her sister, with their friend lady Egerton and sir Henry Longbourne, after having for some time observed the happy group before them, advanced to the table, where they were preparing to drink Mr. Egerton's health.

The villagers were now all standing with their heads uncovered, and "Long life to the heir of Alborough" resounded throughout, which sir Charles joined in pledging. The clear strong ale sparkled in the numerous cans now lifted from the table, and the usual cheers succeeded. Mr. Egerton bowed, and smiled kindly on them all; then taking his glass, gave "the health of the present owners of Alborough Hall," which was enthusiastically repeated and drank, as a fervent "God bless them!" was added by all present.

Sir Charles and his party then returned to the Hall to prepare for dinner, which, on the return of this day, was al-

ways

ways served up on two immense long tables in the large old hall; one for the principal tenants of sir Charles, at which his son always presided, the other for his family and guests.

"Why does not sir Charles celebrate his own birthday, instead of his son's?" said one of the young female guests to the dowager lady Egerton, as they were returning from the happy villagers.

"Because," replied her ladyship, "his heart more sincerely rejoices in that of his heir, which has, since the first, been a day of joy to his family and friends. His son's natal day was hailed with almost-enthusiastic delight by all the inhabitants of Alborough, and each succeeding anniversary of it has increased that joy; as the elders contemplate with pleasure the virtues of the father descended to the son, whilst the hearts of the younger are raised in gratitude as they reflect, that when their old and revered master is taken from them, he will leave a son,

equally

equally worthy of their respect and love, to supply his place."

Had sir Henry Longbourne then seen the expression of Caroline's countenance, whose radiant eyes were fixed on lady Egerton whilst she spoke, his feelings would not have been most enviable; fortunately, however, for the harmony of the day, he did not observe it, as he was then conversing with his grandfather, whose arm he supported.

Lady Egerton entered the apartment of the sisters as they were preparing to put on the dresses they had selected for the ball.

"What do you intend wearing this evening?" said her ladyship, as she viewed with delight and admiration the simple but becoming manner in which they had arranged their hair.

"Oh, our favourite Indian muslin dresses!" replied Caroline; "I like them better than the most splendid court birthday ones."

MAHARAJA SERFOGI'S SARASWATI MAHAL

"And

"And are you, my dear Elinor," again inquired lady Egerton, "equally attached to these Indian favourites of your sister?"

"They are very pretty dresses," replied Elinor smiling; "but I have no very particular reason to admire mine, as the sight of it recalls no pleasant association of ideas; by which, to own the truth, my partiality on such important subjects is generally directed."

"Why, Elinor," exclaimed Caroline hastily, "have you forgotten we wore them on your friend lady Ormsby's wedding-day, and again at the S—— ball?"

"And neither of those evenings are remembered with much pleasure by me," replied Elinor, still smiling; "but I am willing, in order to oblige you, my dear Caroline, to try what effect they will this time produce; one consolation is, I cannot pass a more unpleasant one than those you have mentioned."

"You

"You ought to reflect upon that last evening," returned Caroline, "with the greatest gratitude, as the events that occurred in the course of it were the direct means of breaking the heavy chain which you have since confessed was so very galling; and as to the first day on which you wore this cruelly-despised dress, Elinor, neither sir Edward or lady Ormsby would much approve of your remembering it only as one of the most unpleasant. But I am sure it was quite the contrary after the weeping act was over, and you certainly never appeared to more advantage; I remarked it particularly as we entered the drawing-room before dinner."

"Whose sentiments are you now repeating, Caroline?" said Elinor, archly.

"Clarenville's," whispered Caroline, laughing; and lady Egerton, smiling, said—"I fancy the same opinion that was expressed of Elinor on that day was echoed

echoed of her sister also, to whom some kind little fairy has whispered it again."

"Then you would not," she continued, addressing the now-blushing Caroline, "wear any other dress, even the most elegant, in preference to your old favourite?"

"Have you not yourself, my dear madam," she half-laughing replied, "frequently said, no dress is so becoming to a very young person as a plain simple white one?"

"I am glad to find," returned lady Egerton, as her servant entered with a small caravan, "your partiality to your old favourite is confined to the colour alone, as I came to request you and Elinor would wear to-day the white dresses this box contains, and which," she added with a smile, as old Alice displayed two elegant satin ones, "are composed, in compliment to my nephew's taste, of his most favourite materials."

The

The sisters having expressed their gratitude for her kindness, lady Egerton continued—"I ordered your dress, my dear Caroline, to be made in Elinor's favourite simple style, having lately heard it observed to be the most becoming you could wear. Are you of my opinion?"

"Entirely, my dear madam," she replied, laughing, though blushing, at an allusion she very well understood; "for my taste is, like my native village, too rural ever to admire the French frippery with which the dress of Miss —— at the S—— ball was so abundantly decorated."

"You equally, I hope," returned lady Egerton, "disliked the French indelicacy of her appearance. Did you, my dear Elinor," continued her ladyship, addressing the latter, "ever hear my nephew's remarks on that lady's style of dress?" Elinor answered in the negative, and lady Egerton proceeded—"It

was during the last evening we spent at Rosebrook that your brother Willoughby was giving us a description of the French costume in which a very beautiful young girl made her first appearance at the assize-ball at D——, and whose person, I suspect, presented a more unpleasant view to the eye than even our acquaintance Miss G——'s did. Both the gentlemen expressed the greatest aversion to the style of dress these ladies had adopted; but Charles's remarks on the subject more particularly struck me—'English delicacy revolts at the display of Gallic indecency, and, in my opinion, beauty divests itself of all its charms when once it associates with immodesty.'"

"That is the very sentiment," exclaimed Elinor, "you repeated to me this morning, Caroline, as an extract: how very accurate your memory has been in retaining it!"

"To confess the truth," returned Caroline,

roline, smiling, though blushing still deeper than before, "I wrote down this sage remark soon after lady Egerton repeated it to me, and consigned the precious manuscript to my portfolio, which you know is the repository of many other sentiments equally sublime, culled from various authors and orators."

Both lady Egerton and Elinor smiled; but seeing Caroline look a little distressed, they would not pursue the subject any farther, and the former addressing her said—"As you, my dear Caroline, admire equally with myself Elinor's simple style of dress, will you oblige me by discarding for this day your old Indian friend for a new one of my selecting?"

Caroline delightedly complied, and as she viewed herself in the glass, could not avoid thinking the satin dress would be as much admired as the plain Indian muslin one had before been. Elinor, delighted at seeing her young sister look-

ing so more than usually well, became equally animated; and when, accompanied by lady Egerton, they together entered the saloon, neither sir Charles nor his son could forbear openly expressing the admiration their appearance universally excited.

"Were we inhabitants of lord Byron's favourite climate," said sir Charles, approaching the sisters, as they were conversing with sir Henry Longbourne, "our guests would imagine two of my son's beauteous brides were now present. And which is the most approved?" he continued, smiling on his son, whose arm he rested on.

Mr. Egerton's colour was now even deeper than the damask-rose, but Elinor laughingly replied—"Oh, do not, my dear sir, make so dangerous an inquiry! for who can answer for what fatal consequence our lord and master's decision may produce to the triumphant fair one? spare her, therefore, for pity's sake,

a few

a few years longer from the fatal bowl or dagger of her jealous, mortified rival.'

This sportive petition somewhat relieved the confusion of Mr. Egerton, and Caroline now perceiving Emily Longbourne at some little distance from her, sprung from the party she was with, and hastened to join her young friend.

"What gentleman is to have the honour of dancing the two first dances with you this evening?" inquired Emily of her companion.

"I am engaged to Mr. Egerton," replied Caroline, blushing a little, as she pronounced the name.

"To my uncle!" returned Emily in surprise; "why, I thought he must, according to the rules of etiquette, have opened the ball with the marquis of L——'s daughter."

"I had understood from Mr. Egerton the family were not down at ——."

"They certainly were not when you came to Alborough, nor indeed when the

the invitations for this ball were issued to our other friends; but my grandfather hearing, two or three days since, of the family being arrived, and as the marquis and himself are very old friends, he rode over to the Hall, where he found a large party assembled, who, with the noble owner of the mansion, accepted his cordial invitation with great apparent pleasure."

"Then I fear I have committed a great error," said Caroline, with a half-suppressed sigh, "in accepting the kind offer of Mr. Egerton, but I hope sir Charles will forgive my rustic ignorance;" and as she turned round and looked apprehensively towards the latter, who was still conversing with her sister, she perceived the eyes of Mr. Egerton fixed upon her, and who now instantly approached, fearing, by her countenance, something was wrong.

"My dear uncle Charles," exclaimed Emily, "what apology do you intend offering

offering lady Bertha —— for not opening the ball with her this evening?"

"Lord Wilbourne will be my apology," replied Mr. Egerton smiling, though colouring a little at the inquiry, "for to him do I intend resigning her fair hand; nor do I believe she will feel very much displeased with my arrangement."

"I can answer for her she will not," returned Emily; "but will her father feel equally satisfied?"

"Nay, I care not. At any rate, the marquis cannot be surprised at my having, before his daughter's arrival, solicited the happiness your friend has promised me, and which for twenty lady Berthas I would not resign."

"Yes, but indeed you must," said Caroline in a quick tone; then brightly blushing at observing his look of mingled surprise, mortification, and disappointment, she continued, involuntarily extending her hand, which he eagerly seized, "pray excuse my abrupt manner,

ner, and impute it to my rustic education, which has not qualified me to shine in splendid ball-rooms;" and she archly glanced her eye around the apartment, now appropriately decorated; "and I likewise forgot, in the pleasure I should have felt in making my *debut* with an old friend, the proper respect due to the daughter of a marquis, and to whom you must indeed transfer your engagement."

"And resign this hand," replied Mr. Egerton, gently pressing it, and reproachfully smiling, "to my nephew sir Henry?—is not that what you wish?"

"Oh, no," returned Caroline, blushing still more deeply; "besides, sir Henry has, I believe, engaged my sister."

"Are you quite certain he has, Caro, my young friend?" said Mr. Egerton, in the most earnest manner; "are you quite certain your sister has accepted him?"

"I rather

"I rather suspect Caroline is wrong," said Emily, smiling; "for Miss Belvington told me the other day a previous engagement to George Fitzmorton had obliged her to refuse my brother; yet I also believe Henry is engaged, and to no less a person than his cousin Maria, who has informed every one who would attend to her of the honour she designs him."

"It is an engagement that may be easily dissolved," said Mr. Egerton, as if soliloquizing; "will you therefore," he continued, addressing the blushing and surprised Caroline, "permit me to transfer the partner I had intended for lady Bertha to yourself, as you have so positively rejected me?"

"I will dance with any one you like," she half-laughing replied; "only do not look so very——"

"Petrifying," he again added, with a smile.

"I am afraid that was the expression

of your countenance a moment since," she replied; "but do you really think lord Wilbourne will agree to this exchange, and willingly too? for I assure you he shall not be pressed into the service."

"At any rate," returned Mr. Egerton, "I will not allow you to recede a second time from your promise to me; therefore remember even if lord Wilbourne is not approved, you are to dance the first set only with a partner of my selection."

"How can you submit to such tyranny?" said Emily laughing, as Caroline promised acquiescence; "I really could not have believed you would thus tamely yield to a demand which is the most unreasonable one I ever heard."

"Is this conduct just, fair, and honourable, Charles?" said Mrs. Davenport, who had unobserved approached and overheard the conversation that had been passing, and now as she spoke, drew her brother away; "can you answer it to

Mr.

Mr. Belvington and your own conscience?"

"Surely," he replied, "there is no necessity for my throwing her into the society of so dangerous a rival?"

"Not any," returned Mrs. Davenport; "but in this instance there was no danger; Caroline would never have consented to Henry's forsaking Maria for her, and——"

"Say no more, my dear sister," cried Mr. Egerton, hastily interrupting her; "to all your reasoning, excellent as it is, I can only reply, my resolution is unequal to the part you wish me to perform; and Mr. Belvington must be content with the simple assurance I gave him, of not hinting my wishes to the dear object of my regard; for I cannot promise either you or him any thing farther;" and Mr. Egerton leaving his sister, joined lord Wilbourne, to whom he pointed out Caroline, and was immedi-

 ately,

ately, as he had expected, solicited by his lordship to introduce him.

With this request Mr. Egerton most willingly complied, and had soon the satisfaction of hearing Caroline accept her new acquaintance as a partner. He then addressed her himself, and in an anxious tone said, "Shall I be more fortunate in my second application, or do you intend to punish me for the tyranny which Emily accuses me of having exerted, and refuse me as a partner when your engagement with lord Wilbourne is concluded?"

"Will you refuse me the two third dances," returned Caroline, sportively, "as the two second I am not at my own disposal? but if you are otherwise engaged, or otherwise disposed, I shall bear my disappointment meekly, for it will be no more than I deserve."

Caroline's eyes again fell under the splendid flash of pleasure that darted from

from the generally-grave, though expressive ones of Mr. Egerton, who, delighted with this proof of confidence and friendship, eagerly availed himself of it; and though now obliged to leave her, and attend to the other guests of his father, the slow, unwilling step with which he retreated was evident to his young niece Emily, who, laughing, said to lord Wilbourne—"Is not my uncle Charles become quite a different creature since his last birthday?"

"He does not appear the same being," returned his lordship, "and I really think the man must have fallen in love, and his attentions been received kindly by the fair object of his adoration; nothing else could have caused so great an alteration."

"What is your opinion, Caroline, of uncle Charles?" said Emily; "is he altered since you first knew him?"

"Oh, yes, very much indeed, and is become a great deal pleasanter; for his

manners

manners are not half so serious and reserved as they were when he first came to Rosebrook, and I like him now much better on that very account."

"Oh happy Egerton!" exclaimed lord Wilbourne, smiling; "surely some kind fairy ought to whisper this flattering declaration in your ear!"

"He knows it already," replied Caroline, in the same unconscious manner; but perceiving a smile now arise on the countenance of lord Wilbourne, and a similar one on that of Emily, she started, blushed, and attempting to laugh, added—"At least he knows I have lost a little of the dread his first grave solemn appearance excited; but that is now accounted for, as he is, you say, altered so much for the better lately."

Neither Emily nor his lordship could now refrain from laughing; and Caroline, a little provoked, was turning from them when her young friend Maria caught her by the arm, exclaiming—"Why, how

how I have been searching for you!" Here Maria suddenly stopped, she looked earnestly at Caroline, at her hair, her dress, her ornaments; then in a voice of anger continued—"How very smart you are to what I am! This is my birthday, and I ought to have had just such a pretty satin frock; and mamma ought to have bought me a pearl necklace, for I am only six months younger than you are, instead of making me wear this nasty coral one;" and tears of envy now stood in Maria's eyes.

Lord Wilbourne surprised, and Caroline vexed with the silly girl, remained silent; but Emily, entertained at her cousin's folly, laughingly replied—"If you can tell me, Maria, what ornaments queen Elizabeth used to wear, I will give you a row of pearls directly; and if you can inform me what relation she was to her sister queen Mary, I will add a pearl comb for your hair, similar to the one Caroline's is now fastened with."

"Hush,

"Hush, dear Emily!" cried Caroline, in the most earnest manner; "Mrs. Davenport would be much hurt were she to overhear you, and I regard her too sincerely to allow of her feelings being so cruelly and unnecessarily wounded."

"I am rather afraid my flighty, thoughtless nonsense has been overheard," returned Emily, blushing, as she perceived Mrs. Davenport standing beside her; "and what apology can I offer my dear aunt that she will accept?"

"I require none, Emily," replied that lady in a serious tone; "though I am truly grieved to find Maria so little benefited by the kindness and attention of her young instructress. But I came to inform you our friends are already moving to the dining-hall, whither we had better follow them."

"My dear, dear aunt," cried Emily, the tears springing to her eyes, and she paused; but Mrs. Davenport understood the penitent tone, and kindly pressing her

her hand, in a low voice answered—"Unite your endeavours with those of our sweet Caroline in weaning Maria from her childish habits, and you will equally with her share in my warmest affection and gratitude." Emily gratefully kissed the hand of her aunt, and promised to be all she wished.

They were now again joined by Mr. Egerton, who entreated they would hasten to the hall, where his tenants were already assembled. "And you will, I hope, my dear sister," he continued to Mrs. Davenport, "take your usual place as lady president at my table; lord Wilbourne will be your assistant, and Emily will enliven you both by her conversation."

"My dear Caroline," said Mrs. Davenport to the latter, after acquiescing in her brother's request, "will you condescend to personate for this day a tenant of sir Charles, that I may have you by me also?"

"No,

"No, my dear sister," Mr. Egerton hastily exclaimed, "you must have my father's oldest tenant on your other hand; therefore I think Miss Caroline Belvington will be pleasanter situated by my nephew Arthur or her sister, who," he continued, his colour heightening as he spoke, "intend honouring me with their company at the lower end of the table."

"Will not that situation be a very stupid one for Caroline?" said Emily, a little archly; "Arthur's attention will, or ought to be entirely directed to Elinor; and as yours must, of course, be divided amongst your guests, I cannot help thinking Caroline would be better entertained by lord Wilbourne, or my grandfather's old tenant."

Mr. Egerton coloured highly, and remained for a moment silent; then smiling replied—"Your cousin, Edward Dorrington, will also sit by me, Emily; and surely it cannot be denied his powers

ers of conversation are sufficiently entertaining to please either the most fastidious or lively of your sex."

"That little malevolent dart was aimed at me;" said Caroline, in a pretended whisper to Emily.

Mr. Egerton again smiled, but satisfied with having silenced Emily, who offered no farther objection, he answered not, except by drawing the hand he had taken through his arm, and then led the way to the hall where the guests were nearly all seated at table, and had the pleasure of placing his young and not unwilling companion on one hand of him, and Elinor on the other.

"Surely this hall must very much resemble that of Fingal," said the delighted Caroline, as she gazed around her, and listened to the loud notes of the band which played during the time of dinner.

"And let us 'strike the harp in the praise

praise of Bragela!" said Arthur Campbell, laughing.

"I vote for pledging the fair one," said Edward Dorrington, in the same gay tone, and raising his glass, gallantly bowed to Elinor, by whom he was sitting.

"Shall we drink 'health and happiness' to our absent friends, Elinor?" said Caroline, laughing.

"I think that toast may now be omitted, as our friends are at so little distance from us;" and Elinor now looked as archly at Caroline as the latter was in the habit of doing towards her.

The cloth being removed, sir Charles, filling his glass, rose from his seat, and proposed to his guests and tenants his usual toast on the anniversary of that day—"The heir of Alborough! and may this day frequently return, and be enjoyed by all who now participate in the festivity of its celebration!"

Mr.

Mr. Egerton gracefully bowed his acknowledgments, as the guests, rising also, repeated the toast; after which, addressing the tenants, he proposed—"The health of their beloved and respected landlord."—"And may he live many happy years to celebrate the birthday of his son!" was enthusiastically added by them all.

Sir Charles bent his venerable head; and as a tear of pleasure glistened in his eye, a smile of benevolence and pleasure illuminated his aged countenance.

"How beautiful, how lovely is age," exclaimed Elinor, "clothed in such a garb! may we live, dear Caroline, to see our beloved father looking the same at that period!"

"Heaven grant we may, dear Elinor! yet surely our dear father's countenance will never beam more affectionately, more benignly, on his children, than it now does."

"Oh

"Oh never, never!" returned Elinor, with energy.

Mr. Egerton had alone overheard these affectionate and grateful effusions, which were spoken in too low a tone for any other ear to receive the sound; but his, as Caroline had before remarked, was endowed with such a remarkably acute sense of hearing, that scarcely the lowest whisper could escape him.

The ladies did not remain long afterwards; and as soon as they retired, lady Egerton's health was enthusiastically drank, nor were her female guests forgotten; after which the tables were removed, the tenants departed, and the gentlemen returned to the saloon, now converted into a ball-room.

CHAP.

CHAPTER III.

SEVERAL of the families around Alborough, though not in habits of intimacy with the family, were always invited to partake of the evening's amusement, and their carriages now began rapidly to succeed each other. Those of the marquis of L—— and his friends were not the latest; but the room was, ere their arrival, so filled with company, that Elinor, who had a great curiosity to see that nobleman, could not for some time distinguish any of the party. At length her companion, Edward Dorrington, pointed the marquis out to her observation, as, accompanied by a lady whose arm rested in his, he advanced up the room; and in the former, Elinor, to her great

great surprise, recognised Mrs. Montague.

In another instant she was convinced the recognition was mutual, but Edward Dorrington having left her to address an acquaintance, and being at some distance from her other friends, Mrs. Montague imagined she was only a permitted guest, probably a visitor at one of the private families, who were invited solely on account of their vicinity to the Hall, and therefore affected not to have observed her.

Elinor's former contempt for her cousin scarcely admitted of increase; and as a smile of the same feeling crossed her countenance, she turned from this foolish woman, and joined her friend, lady Egerton, who, accompanied by the marquis of L——'s eldest son, now approached, and whom she introduced as a candidate for her hand the two first dances.

Not

Not a shadow of regret passed across Elinor's mind, as she answered a pre-engagement to Mr. Dorrington obliged her to decline the honour of dancing with his lordship; but the latter exerted his influence over Edward so effectually that he induced him to relinquish his claim, and entreat his cousin Emily to accept a discarded swain; and he appeared equally delighted with his lordship on finding his petition accepted.

Lord Mowbray informed Elinor of his success, and she accepted his hand with the same indifference she had before declined it.

To her it was that evening the same whether her partner bore the title of lord, marquis, or duke, as the only one she would have accepted with pleasure 'was far away.' Yet the gaiety of the scene around entertained her, and the first notes of a lively country-dance, which lady Bertha now called, made her heart bound in unison, and lord Mow-

bray did not complain of his partner being an inanimate one, whilst Mrs. Montague's surprise and mortification, as she observed the undivided attention he paid Elinor, exceeded all bounds.

The dancers had divided into two sets, and Elinor, as the partner of a man of rank, the highest, except his father, in the room, led the way down the second. Mrs. Montague's station was in the set headed by lady Bertha; her ladyship was conversing familiarly with Caroline, another rural cousin, dancing also with a nobleman, the son of an earl, whilst her partner was the son only of a baronet. He was a relation of Mr. Montague's, and had thought it incumbent upon him to ask her to dance, as lord Mowbray he found shirked that honour.

Caroline's surprise at perceiving Mrs. Montague equalled, if not exceeded, Elinor's, who had been aware Mr. Montague was known to the marquis of L——, whom Clarenville had mentioned to her as

as a very extraordinary character, and she had much wished to see him; but he had not returned the morning call of her cousin before she left Ashgrove.

Caroline, ignorant of Mrs. Montague's pretended blindness towards her sister, returned that lady's cordial shake of the hand as she passed her in the dance; and to her earnest inquiry of who are you with? carelessly answered—"With our kind friend, lady Egerton, and of course guests in this house."

Mrs. Montague was thunderstruck. Again she turned and looked at Elinor: her dancing appeared more graceful than ever: lord Mowbray seemed animated almost beyond himself, and the marquis of L—— was gazing at *the distant relation* of Mr. Montague with looks of marked admiration.

Whichever way poor Mrs. Montague turned, whomsoever she addressed, the same expressions of admiration met her ear. "What beautiful girls are the Miss

 Belvingtons!

Belvingtons! how graceful the dancing of the elder! how animated that of the younger!"

Were these the girls whom her friend lady Wallingford, when she saw them at S——, held up to ridicule as the vicar of Wakefield's daughters? How did she now wish her eyes had retained their usual clear-sightedness as they met those of Elinor on her entrance! she dreaded again meeting the glance of this so lately despised relation, judging by herself it would be one of the haughtiest and most forbidding. But she had to learn that the contempt Elinor felt for her precluded the least approach to anger. Her surprise therefore was great when she found the latter met her advances in the same easy, unconstrained manner she had ever done; answered all her numerous questions relative to their Rosebrook friends in a tone not less cheerful; and then proceeded to inquire for Mr. Montague, "for whom," she added, "I have

have often looked since your entrance, but in vain."

"Is it possible I have been so highly honoured?" said a voice beside her; and Elinor hastily turning, presented a willing hand to her cousin. "No, no," he continued, after cordially pressing it, "I dare not flatter myself that the most admired belle in the room, whose charms this evening have taken captive even the heart of a marquis, can have bestowed one thought or look upon an old untitled relation—a mere country-cousin, who is obliged to compound for the few weeks he spends each year in the gay capital, by passing the remainder in retirement and the strictest economy at his paltry little farmhouse in Surrey—a mansion which, however, is designated by him and his foolish wife by the high-sounding appellation of Ashgrove Lodge. Now is not this the description (if indeed you have condescended to mention my name)

you have given of me this evening, Elinor?"

"To a syllable," she returned, laughing, not so much at her cousin's speech as at the wrathful and confused countenance of his wife, who now pettishly exclaimed—"How can you talk such nonsense, Mr. Montague? You are detaining Elinor likewise from the dance, and lord Mowbray, neither of which she will much thank us for."

"But I have a hundred questions to ask my fair coz," returned Mr. Montague; "therefore she must not leave me yet."

"You must, my dear sir, defer them to a more convenient opportunity," said lord Mowbray, "as I can no longer at present allow of your engrossing so entirely the attention of this lady;" and he again led Elinor to the dance.

After it had concluded, and his lordship had, though unwillingly, resigned

his fair partner to Mr. Egerton, Caroline perceiving the latter had left her sister, and was speaking to sir Henry Longbourne, sprung towards her, exclaiming, as she shook her by the hand—"Allow me, dear Elinor, to offer my congratulations on the conquest you have this evening made. Lord Mowbray has, with rapturous delight, been assuring Mr. Egerton, who did not, of course, venture to contradict him, that the partner his aunt introduced him to is the most graceful dancer, and the most beautiful, elegant young woman he ever saw. His lordship already talks of darts, wounds, and flames; and if you still continue that smile of ridicule, Elinor, he will soon proceed to daggers, pistols, and broad-swords. Do pray, my dear sister, let me see you look a little more elevated by the magnificent prospect now opening to your view. Does that shake of the head intimate I soar not quite so high, Caroline? my ambition extends no far-

ther than a younger son or nephew of a baronet."

"I hope, Caroline," returned Elinor, laughing, though she could not suppress a blush, which she knew would not escape the observation of her sister, "I hope you will allow me credit for a little more ambition, when I inform you, I prefer the *eldest* son of a baronet, at least for the two next dances.—Is the room too warm for you, Caroline," she archly added, "as your heightened colour leads me to apprehend?"

"I am not conscious of any variation in its hue," replied Caroline, half-laughing; "but see," she continued, turning from her sister, "the noble heir of Alborough approaches; and lo! his nephew also is marching this way, to inform me, what I can as plainly discern, that the dance has commenced: now, as I am terribly afraid this exertion will fatigue him, I will hasten to my station in the set by lady Bertha, that should he

he flag ere it concludes, my conscience may acquit me of having increased his weariness." Caroline now passing by a contrary way to that in which sir Henry was approaching, quickly regained her place in the dance, and Elinor, accompanied by her partner, followed the example of her sister.

"You look fatigued, my love," said lady Egerton to Elinor, when Mr. Egerton, at the conclusion of the set, led her to a seat beside his aunt.

"Not sufficiently so, I hope," she replied, "to prevent me from fulfilling my engagement with Mr. Edward Dorrington, which was, you know, before transferred to lord Mowbray."

"I am very much afraid," returned lady Egerton, smiling, "that my nephew Charles has been rather a heavy partner, for I never saw you till now look fatigued from dancing: now honestly confess my suspicions are just."

"Oh, no," returned Elinor, laughing, "Mr.

"Mr. Egerton was only a little absent; but I imputed this small fault to fatigue alone, and felt very sorry at having been the cause of increasing it."

"I greatly fear," said Mr. Egerton, half-smiling, "Miss Belvington did not originally approve of me as a partner, and politeness alone prevented her refusing me; at least, I cannot plead fatigue as an excuse for my dullness, which certainly must be innate, as I never before so much enjoyed the festivities of this day, and each succeeding dance increases the spirit with which I first entered into the amusement."

Sir Henry Longbourne was now observed leading Caroline to a seat, and Mr. Egerton, hastily rising, hurried towards them, and having claimed his partner from the baronet, again proceeded with her to the dance.

"Egerton scarcely allows us time to breathe," said young Dorrington to Elinor, as he pointed to the former, who with

with Caroline had already commenced dancing to one of her favourite and most inspiriting measures. "Why the man," he continued, "has taken upon him a second nature, for, like his lively partner, he scarcely appears to touch the ground."

"I have seen Miss Belvington look full as blithe," said Mr. Montague, who had unobserved approached, and overheard this remark; "but that was when she was young and airy, the partner of —let me see—Elinor, whom did you dance with at the Lesford ball? I know you did not honour me so far."

"Because you never gave me an opportunity," said Elinor, laughing, though much provoked; "but you shall no longer have reason to complain on that account, as I am now perfectly willing to confer that honour on you."

"Excuse me, my fair coz," returned Mr. Montague, bowing; "but, old as I now am, life has yet sufficient charms

for me not voluntarily to run the hazard of losing it, which would infallibly happen, were I to attempt engrossing so fair and contested a prize. But if you will accompany lady Egerton to Ashgrove next week, the great barn shall be decorated—we will send for our favourite old widow, and her sweet young Mr. Clarenville; and then, with partners so well suited to each other, the ball will be opened with great eclat. Does this plan meet your approbation?"

"I shall have great pleasure in accompanying lady Egerton to Ashgrove," replied Elinor, blushing, "and again visiting your old *protégée*. Pray tell me, does she still continue well, and able to enjoy the comforts of her pretty cottage?"

"Oh, she looks ten years younger since you last saw her, and particularly when we together converse of her dear young benefactress, as she always styles you; age, then, seems to recede from

her

her venerable countenance, which is lighted up with so brilliant a smile that it takes my heart captive. I alight from my horse, seat myself on the bench before the door, drink the milk of her favourite cow (this animal, by the bye, is named Nelly—I christened her myself), and then my old lady, leaning upon her stick, thus begins—'Well, honoured sir, is my sweet young lamb married yet? Ah! woe is me, it will never be my good luck to see her dear beautiful face again! for she will soon, I suppose, be a-going along with her soldier to some of our fighting countries. Lack-a-day! I did once hope she would have sat down in old England, with that nice, sweet young gentleman who came to see me, and seemed——"

"You must finish your history another time," said Elinor, hastily rising and turning aside her deeply-blushing countenance, "for I can no longer refrain from dancing to this inspiring tune."

"One

"One moment more," cried Mr. Montague, detaining her, "till I have portrayed, though in colours far too faint, the almost-ecstatic joy of our old friend, when informed by me (and I rode to her cottage on purpose to communicate the happy tidings) that you had given up the idea of visiting foreign countries, preferring to remain in your own native one, and——"

"I can no longer detain Mr. Dorrington from the dance," exclaimed Elinor, breaking from her tormenting cousin; and followed by her partner, she hastened towards it. Supper was announced soon after; Caroline immediately joined her sister, and escorted by their respective beaux, they proceeded to the apartment in which it was prepared.

"Does not this ball, Elinor, far exceed the S—— one?" inquired Caroline, in a most animated tone.

"Oh, very, very far," replied Elinor, in a voice equally so.

"Ah, I knew you would be of my opinion," returned Caroline, laughing; "and is it not also the most delightful ball you ever were at?"

Elinor blushed, as she answered—"I have been at some equally pleasant."

"Now that is very ungrateful to poor lord Mowbray," returned Caroline; "he has exerted every effort in his power to make it the most delightful to you."

"My dear Caroline, let that name rest, with all the flattering expressions you have before repeated, which I acknowledge are as far superior to what I deserve as they are most ungratefully received."

"It is reserved for lord Mowbray, then," said Caroline, laughing, "to kindle, in the bosom of the hitherto-gentle Elinor, wrath most direful against her hapless sister."

Lord Mowbray now joining them, prevented Caroline from continuing the subject; he placed himself by Elinor at

supper,

supper, young Dorrington having left her to procure a seat for his cousin Emily, who had kindly rewarded him for his attention by making room for him to sit beside her.

Supper being ended, dancing again commenced with renewed spirit. Elinor, after her engagement with Edward Dorrington had concluded, was again the partner of lord Mowbray. Caroline appeared that evening the happiest of the happy: sir Henry had, as they returned to the ball-room, again requested her to dance with him; but, to Mr. Egerton's great satisfaction, she pleaded a pre-engagement, and he had himself most providently secured her hand when she was again at liberty.

Poor Mrs. Montague, in seeing Elinor selected as a partner by lord Mowbray a second time, experienced a still more acute pang than she had done at the commencement of the evening; it did not, however, prevent her expressing to

Elinor

Elinor the great pleasure lady Egerton's promise of bringing her young friends to Ashgrove the next week had given her; and Mr. Montague assured his fair coz the old widow should have the happy tidings communicated to her within the space of four-and-twenty hours.

Maria Davenport had, fortunately for Caroline, been plentifully supplied with partners, and the ball continued to a late, or rather an early hour, when the company retired, much pleased with their evening's entertainment, and forming their different conjectures on the happy alteration the now-animated manners of the heir of Alborough had sustained.

CHAP-

CHAPTER IV.

In the course of the two following mornings, all the guests at Alborough Hall had departed, except the more immediate relatives of the aged owners; and this comparatively-small party now sought and found amusement in riding, dancing, music, or conversation; by which the days flew so rapidly away, that Caroline could scarcely believe the one appointed by lady Egerton for leaving her brother was fast approaching.

Sir Charles became, each succeeding hour, more attached to Caroline, and his nephew sir Henry's attentions to her did not appear to decrease. They were beheld at times by Mr. Egerton with the greatest alarm; but the total indifference with which they were received prevented

prevented him from entirely sinking into despondency.

"I wish, my dear sister," said sir Charles to lady Egerton, two days preceding that she had fixed on for her departure, "I wish you would consent to leave our little sparkler with us till your visit at Ashgrove is concluded."

"My dear aunt," exclaimed sir Henry, eagerly, "do consent to oblige my grandfather."

"Without inquiring of Caroline, or rather of her guardian sister, if she approve the plan?" returned lady Egerton.

"I think I can answer for Caroline's willing assent," said Emily smiling.

"Then I will endeavour to procure the sanction of her sister," cried sir Henry; and leaving the room, he immediately proceeded to the garden, where he had perceived Elinor walking with Caroline and Mr. Egerton.

"Oh, listen to an humble suppliant!"

ant!" he exclaimed as he joined them; and Elinor having sportively desired him to name his request, he eagerly proceeded to mention that of his grandfather to their friend lady Egerton; "and now, most noble and revered uncle," he continued, addressing Mr. Egerton, "unite your entreaties with mine, and let us endeavour to procure Miss Belvington's consent to our request, which, if given, will obtain that of my aunt also; and Emily has assured us, the sister of this lady directress will not refuse the petition of her most humble slaves."

"Emily is very much mistaken," exclaimed Caroline, hastily; "I certainly shall not consent to remain here; for," she continued, with a heightened colour, on observing the surprise of her companions, "I have promised Mr. Montague to accompany my sister to Ashgrove, that he may introduce her favourite old widow to me, of whom I have heard so many interesting anecdotes, that I am wild

wild to become acquainted with her, and no inducement can prevail with me to miss the opportunity now afforded me."

Mr. Egerton's countenance now betrayed the severest disappointment; Elinor's surprise prevented her from speaking, whilst sir Henry still continued to press his grandfather's request, and vehemently entreated she would exert her influence, and endeavour to procure a revocation of this cruel resolution; and Caroline as earnestly continued her negative.

They now quickly returned to the house, and the latter immediately left the party and ran up to her own room, whither she was soon followed by her sister and lady Egerton. "Do not attempt to change my resolution," she exclaimed as they entered, "which is so immoveably fixed, that no person on earth shall induce me to swerve from it."

"But,

"But, my dearest Caroline," returned Elinor, "will not sir Charles and lady Egerton have great reason to feel hurt at your refusal?"

"Dear Elinor," replied Caroline, apparently greatly distressed, "I cannot help that; but you know, at any rate I could not have remained here, as my mother particularly requested me, before I left Rosebrook, not to allow any one to separate me from you."

"When you left Rosebrook," returned Elinor, smiling, "my mother knew not if she could confide in your prudence when absent from your guardian genius; but she is now, from the accounts I have written her, so perfectly convinced it may be trusted, even in cases of the greatest importance, that I can safely affirm our separation, for a few days only, would meet with no objection on her part."

Caroline remained silent a few moments. At length, with a repressed sigh,

though smiling, she replied—"Elinor, I go with you to Ashgrove; and as such is my final determination, nothing further remains to be said;" and Caroline kissing her hand to her sister, hastily left the room.

"What are we to understand by this strange behaviour?" said Elinor to lady Egerton, after a few moments' silence; "surely Caroline's senses must have forsaken her!"

"No," replied her ladyship, half-smiling, "they are, I believe, as perfect as ever; but your sister has discovered poor Charles's evident devotion, which she is too void of vanity to encourage, as she cannot reward it, and therefore wishes to shun his society at present."

"I cannot believe those are Caroline's sentiments towards Mr. Egerton," returned Elinor.

The hasty re-appearance of Caroline prevented lady Egerton's reply, and Elinor observing the countenance of her

sister

sister looked disturbed, immediately inquired the cause; but the latter assured her she was not conscious of its expression being otherwise than the most serene; and then, hastening to the toilet, commenced her preparations for dinner. Lady Egerton soon after retired for the same purpose, and Caroline, on finding herself alone with Elinor, laughingly exclaimed—"Well, my dear sister, have you or lady Egerton discovered the weighty cause that prompts me to disobedience?"

"If you allude to the request of sir Charles, my dear sister," returned Elinor, "one only motive can be assigned for your refusal—disinclination."

"My dear sister, allow me to reply, you are both totally mistaken."

Elinor smiled, as shaking her head she returned—"You are a most incomprehensible girl, Caroline."

Caroline laughed, blushed, and singing one of her favourite country-dances, turned

turned from her sister and continued dressing.

When Elinor had finished her toilet, she informed Caroline she was ready, as they had always hitherto entered the drawing-room together, where they generally found some of the family assembled: but Caroline was this day unusually dilatory; and after the former had waited for her a few moments, she exclaimed, without turning towards her sister—"Do not wait for me to-day, Elinor; I am taken in a very studious fit, and besides wish to finish, before dinner, a book Emily has lent me, in which I am very much interested."

Elinor, though surprised, and unable to account for her sister's conduct, complied with her request, and descended alone to the saloon, at the door of which she was met by sir Henry, who seeing her unaccompanied, hastily inquired for her usual companion; and Emily laughingly exclaimed, as she heard Elinor reply,

ply, she had left her sister engaged in reading, "Caroline perhaps is, like my cousin Edward, studying for a degree, and therefore devotes every moment she can seize upon to her folios, quartos, and octavos."

"Nay, Emily," returned Mrs. Davenport smiling, "I think our young friend is far more studious than Edward has lately been; his time is now very differently employed, and I really believe he has not opened a book since he came to Alborough."

"I have not seen him this morning," said Emily, blushing; and turning to Mr. Egerton, who was standing by a window at some distance, she continued —"Did you not say, uncle Charles, that Edward has been since breakfast deeply engaged at his college studies?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Egerton, after a moment's silence, "I caught a glimpse of her in the gallery about half-an-hour since."

"Poor

"Poor Edward!" exclaimed Emily, laughing, "I really was not aware of your transformation."

"Transformation!" repeated Mr. Egerton, in surprise, and turning hastily towards his niece—"explain your meaning, Emily, for I really cannot comprehend it."

"I am equally ignorant of the magic that has been employed," she laughingly replied.

Mrs. Davenport now explained to her brother the cause of Emily's mirth, and fortunately for him, Edward then entered, in conversing with whom she forgot the *mal-à-propos* answer of her uncle.

The dinner-bell had rung some time, and the party were nearly all seated at table before Caroline joined them; she entered the room with her usual gaiety, and holding up the book she held to the view of Elinor, said—"My task is happily finished;" then, without appear-

ing to observe the vacant seat near her between sir Henry and Mr. Egerton, she bounded forward to one next sir Charles, and during the time of dinner conversed almost solely with him, who ever delighted in, and encouraged her sportive remarks: but Mrs. Davenport, by whom she was also sitting, remained unusually silent, and neither her brother nor his nephew sir Henry appeared more inclined to join in the general conversation, which was never otherwise than cheerful. Sir Charles kindly expressed to Caroline the regret he felt at not being able to detain her a few days longer; and Elinor observed, with surprise, the deep blush that passed across her sister's cheek, as she answered—Mr. Montague had particularly requested her to accompany lady Egerton to Ashgrove."

On leaving the dining-room, the latter remarked her nephew, sir Henry, detained Caroline a moment as she passed him,

him, and addressed a few words to her in a very low tone; she hastily answered him, and immediately disengaging her hand, which he had taken, quickly retreated from the room. Mr. Egerton's colour at the same moment rapidly varied as he hastily swallowed the wine his glass contained, and which he again immediately replenished.

In a few minutes after they had entered the saloon, Elinor observed Caroline was absent from it; and having waited her appearance some time in vain, she left the apartment, and hastened to her own, whither she feared some sudden indisposition had obliged her sister to retire.

The room however was unoccupied, and having met lady Egerton's servant, who assured her Caroline was not above stairs, Elinor again descended; and as she passed the music-room in her way to the saloon, she distinguished the voice of sir Henry from thence, addressing

some one in a most earnest tone; in another instant she started, and her steps were involuntarily checked, as her ear recognised the voice of Caroline in a reply, which was almost immediately interrupted by sir Henry's exclaiming—"Oh! do not speak so very decidedly; give me a few months' trial; allow me at least to visit you at Rosebrook."

"Not to renew this subject," returned Caroline, hastily; "I cannot, sir Henry," she continued, still more earnestly, "I cannot, either at Rosebrook or Alborough, answer you in any other manner than I have now done; therefore pray allow me to pass;" and Elinor perceived an attempt was made to open the door, which was however opposed, and again she heard Caroline entreat sir Henry to allow of her leaving him. Feeling now convinced her sister was unwillingly detained, Elinor tapped at the door, and requested admittance.

"Come in, my dear sister," cried Caroline,

roline, in a tone of joy, as she now, without opposition, threw open the door; and sir Henry, nettled at the interruption, hastily quitted the apartment.

Caroline eagerly listened to his receding footsteps; and when they were no longer heard, clasping her hands in the wildest delight, she exclaimed—"Thank Heaven, it is over!"

"What is over, my dear sister?" inquired Elinor, smiling.

"One of the most disagreeable scenes I ever in my life encountered," replied Caroline. "There!" she continued, making a deep inspiration, "that is the first breath I have drawn with freedom since I went down this morning to breakfast; and so violent has been the oppression I have suffered from, that I began to be terribly apprehensive my old spring enemy was returning; and blisters, lancets, draughts, and dapper little Mr. Dawson, appeared in dire array before my eyes."

"And what has so suddenly relieved your apprehensions?" inquired Elinor, laughing.

"The melodious sound of my fair sister's voice, which I have before observed, is a most specific remedy for heart-burnings or heart-aches. Ah! it comes o'er the ear like the sweet south upon a bank of violets; but never, never did it sound so harmoniously to mine, as it did five minutes ago."

"Is it your intention, my dear Caroline," inquired Elinor, blushing at the arch look which accompanied the quotation, "to acquaint me with the cause of your alarm, or must I apply to sir Henry for an explanation?"

"If you will have the goodness, Elinor, to be less impatient, your curiosity shall soon be gratified; but you must allow me a little time to recover myself first."

"Is it not rather unreasonable in you, Caroline," returned Elinor, archly, "to expect

expect I should grant a petition you have so lately denied another?"

"Ah, Elinor!" said Caroline, blushing and half-laughing, "your ignorance then is only counterfeit, and you have overheard all that has passed."

"No, believe me, I have not; nothing, I assure you, reached my ear, except sir Henry's last request, which you so positively refused granting, when, imagining a release from confinement would not be unacceptable, I sought to aid your wishes; and indeed you ought to be very grateful for my consideration, as the glance I received on my entrance was far more petrifying than any touch from your friend the Torpedo."

"Indeed I am very grateful," replied Caroline, laughing; "and I promise you the infinite obligation shall be returned, when I have any reason to suspect you are in danger of a similar annoyance. Neither countrymen nor foreigners, Eng-

lishmen, Americans, nay, even our friends the French, nor any one now resident on the Continent, shall then escape their just punishment."

"Caroline," said Elinor, half-laughing, "remember you are at present in my power; tempt me not, therefore, to exert it too much, but tell me all that has passed between sir Henry and yourself, and let all other subjects rest."

"Now that was a remarkably well-turned period," cried the incorrigible Caroline, "and I much, though vainly, wish I could successfully imitate such a pattern, in the narrative I am now going to give my dear, though impatient sister.

"It was impossible either lady Egerton or yourself could imagine I was otherwise than wilfully blind to the displeasure your countenances expressed, when I this morning positively refused to remain here, even for a few days longer; yet you were not sufficiently clever

clever to discover the cause of this determination, which, I grant you, must have appeared very strange and unaccountable. But as you were not aware how much my vanity had been raised by the attentions of a certain baronet, who shall at present be nameless, it is not perhaps very wonderful you failed in assigning the true reason of my wishing to escape from Alborough on the first opportunity.

"Neither were you acquainted with the reflections that arose in my mind when first I suspected these unwished-for attentions were serious ones, which, to own the truth, first struck me on the birthnight of the heir-apparent, when thus I communed within myself, after the example of my favourite Launcelot:—'Caroline,' I began, 'you came from Rosebrook, in Hampshire, a well-meaning girl, though very liable to fall into error, and, considering your age and sex, tolerably free from vanity: now,' I continued

tinued to this self-same Caroline, 'is not this vanity a little, nay more than a little, flattered by the evident partiality of this young, elegant, and agreeable baronet, who has kindly overlooked all your foibles, and, what is still more delightful, admires them, even more than some other folk will ever do your better qualities? You certainly are but a novice in love-affairs at present; but it is impossible for you long to remain either blind or deaf to the truth I have now related. Now, Caroline, answer me sincerely; can you really wish to remain a guest under the same roof with this smitten deer (as you have been this day very much pressed) after your companions proceed to Ashgrove, and thereby procure a full tribute to your vanity? or had you rather resign this flattering prospect, and, for the sake of a clear conscience, put a decided negative upon a request which you would otherwise, with the greatest pleasure, have acceded to, and

accompany your instructress on the point we have been now canvassing to Mr. Montague's? Now let me hear your decision.

" At that moment my friend Modesty put forward her little blushing face and whispered—' Does not Vanity herself suggest these very suspicions?'

' She may perhaps,' I replied; ' but even if she has, it will be better to avoid any of her more dangerous temptations; therefore I go to Mr. Montague's.'

' But will not Elinor think you extremely ungrateful to your Alborough friends? and if this conduct appear in that light to her partial eyes, will it not be viewed in a much deeper shade by sir Charles and his family, who have endeavoured, by every means in their power, to make your visit pleasant, and now so very kindly entreat you to prolong it?'

' Indeed I fear they will have, apparently, great reason to feel hurt with me;

me; but much as I shall regret losing their good opinion, it is still necessary for me to pursue the path female delicacy points out as the only right one; therefore——"

"My dear, dear Caroline!" exclaimed Elinor, no longer able to remain silent, and delightedly and affectionately embracing her sister, "you have indeed proved yourself the genuine pupil of our excellent mother, and how justly proud she will be of her child, when informed of the upright conduct she has pursued! And now tell me, my dearest sister, if sir Henry requested this late conversation as you left the dining-room?"

"He certainly did; and I felt convinced at the time you must have suspected the meaning of that languishing whisper; the request it conveyed I had been prepared for, by a sentence I overheard this morning, after I left you with lady Egerton in our room to ponder over my strange, obstinate refusal.

In

In the gallery leading to Emily's apartment, which you know is next to her brother's, and as I was passing it in my way to hers, I distinguished the voice of sir Henry, who, in a most theatrical tone, exclaimed—'This day shall not pass without my fate being decided; Caroline shall listen to me, and give me her answer, whether favourable or the contrary.'—'At least she will not do so just now, my good friend,' I mentally replied, and immediately made the best of my way back again to you."

"And was this resolution of sir Henry's," inquired Elinor, laughing, "expressed in a soliloquy, or addressed to any confidential friend?"

"It was communicated, I believe," returned Caroline, hesitating a little, "to Mr. Egerton."

"And did he strengthen so noble a resolve by his approbation?"

"I really cannot inform you; for I darted off, and never waited to hear if

he

he made any reply; but I very much suspect I did not escape unobserved, for the door was almost immediately opened, and I am certain it was Mr. Egerton's step I heard in the gallery, whilst endeavouring to turn the handle of our lock, and which I could not unfortunately for some moments effect."

"Might it not have been sir Henry whom you heard?" inquired Elinor, smiling.

"Oh, no! it was not his step I am certain; Mr. Egerton's has a very different sound."

"Indeed," returned Elinor, laughing, "my ear then cannot be so good as yours; for I have frequently mistaken sir Henry's step for his uncle's."

"Probably the air of Alborough has injured your sense of hearing," replied Caroline, with great gravity, "as I remember, when at S——, remarking the wonderful acuteness it possessed, and how exactly it could distinguish the step of

of Mr. Clarenville from that of your favourite Mortimer!"

The truth of this remark Elinor was but too conscious of, and blushing deeply, she said—"Tell me, Caroline, if sir Henry has been entertaining you with as many protestations of love, fidelity, and everlasting attachment, as you have so often accused poor Mortimer of?"

"I did not count sir Henry's very correctly," returned Caroline, "but there were enough, in all conscience; nor could any thing I said in return convince him I was most thoroughly tired of hearing them repeated over so often, till at length he provoked me so extremely, that I told him, in very plain terms, I would no longer listen to such eternal repetitions; that they were not, nor ever would be, pleasing to my ear; and I could scarcely refrain from adding—I must really dull the sound with cotton wool, if you say another word on the subject."

"Cruel

"Cruel Caroline!" exclaimed Elinor, laughing; "but were you able, without proceeding so very far, to convince sir Henry of your ingratitude, and that you did not approve of his too-flattering protestations?"

"I was tolerably successful, I believe," returned Caroline; "but as his vanity would not exactly allow him to suppose these protestations were in themselves disagreeable, he accounted for my disapprobation, much, poor man! to his own satisfaction, by concluding I preferred hearing them repeated by another more highly-favoured mortal."

"And did not sir Henry venture to mention the name of his dreaded rival?" said Elinor, archly.

"If you once interrupt the thread of my narrative, Elinor," returned Caroline, a crimson blush mounting to her cheek, "I shall never be able to resume it. This last-mentioned most notable idea of sir Henry's I could scarcely refrain from

from treating with the ridicule it deserved; however, I merely replied he was totally mistaken, and that it was not very probable a girl, not yet sixteen, could very deeply feel the tender passion; at least he might be assured little Cupid had not yet marked me out as a victim for his altars."

"I hope sir Henry inquired how many years you expected to remain unwounded?"

"Why, I really believe he did, in *satire keen*, make the same inquiry; to which I immediately replied, 'Until I attained my one-and-twentieth year, at which period I expected to feel the little urchin's cruel malice in its most direful extent;' and I hope, Elinor," continued Caroline, with one of her most arch glances, "I hope you approve of my answer."

"Finish your narrative, dear Caroline," said Elinor, "before we are interrupted."

"With

"With pleasure, my dear sister, as I find we so entirely coincide in an opinion which sir Henry ventured to dissent from, and seriously assured me some persons had the good fortune to escape unhurt till the age of three-and-twenty, which period he had attained six weeks ago. Well, all this passed at the beginning of our conversation, and produced only a few random cuts, but they were repeated until they became most terribly-deep slashes, and I soon found who had the worst of the argument, which continued, with unabated vigour, till you gave the signal for separation, and made me cry—Victory!"

Elinor's congratulations on the peaceful manner in which the combat had concluded were interrupted by the entrance of lady Egerton and her nephew, whose agitated countenance plainly told her the deep interest he felt in Caroline's decision.

"What is become of Henry?" inquired

ed lady Egerton, as she looked around the apartment; "I understood he was with you, and performing his part in your little concert."

"Sir Henry was here when I entered," returned Elinor, archly smiling; "but he did not appear to be in a very harmonious mood, for he almost immediately quitted the room, and left us to entertain ourselves in the best manner we could."

The significant tone in which this reply was spoken, the blushing countenance of Caroline, and the now-animated one of her nephew, were equally understood by lady Egerton; but any further remark was precluded by the abrupt entrance of Maria, who instantly exclaimed—"Oh here you all are! why, Caroline, my cousin Arthur has been this last half-hour wondering what was become of you. Only think, aunt Egerton, Arthur is obliged to return to London directly; and my cousin Henry says

he will be his companion; for he thinks it will be so dull for him to go alone. So now I have found you, I will run back and tell Arthur where you are, and then perhaps he will bring me something pretty from London when he comes back."

Caroline's brilliant eyes sparkled with delight at the intelligence Maria had communicated; but seeing a reflection of the emanation in the expressive ones of Mr. Egerton, as they met hers, she turned hastily from him, and approaching the pianoforte, said to her sister—"Elinor, I wish you would play this duet with me; it is one Emily has particularly begged me to practise, as my performance is at present very incorrect."

Elinor offered no objection, and lady Egerton wishing to see her nephews before they left the Hall, hastened back to the drawing-room, whilst her nephew, by remaining, rendered himself

extremely useful to the fair performers, in turning over the leaves of their music-book.

The duet was scarcely finished when Arthur Campbell entered to bid farewell to the trio, and express his regret at being obliged to leave so pleasant a party. "But duty," he continued, "imperious duty, will not allow of my remaining here, and Longbourne is almost equally peremptory; he has, I understand, already said adieu, and therefore will scarcely allow me time to follow his example." Sir Henry's voice was now heard in the hall, inquiring if he were ready, and Arthur, though reluctantly, was obliged to leave his companions.

Caroline had retreated to the farthest extremity of the apartment, where she continued silent and immoveable till she heard her sister remark to Mr. Egerton, as they stood together at the window, what a beautiful horse sir Henry was riding. She then ventured to advance,

and perceived him with his cousin, galloping at full speed down the avenue.

As if released from prison, Caroline now bounded from the room; she was quickly followed by her companions; and as they entered the drawing-room, sir Charles approached them, and taking the hand of Elinor, said—"My dear Miss Belvington, I have been assured by my sister, that if we venture to detain our little sparkler at Alborough a few weeks longer, you will endeavour to procure us Mr. Montague's forgiveness, by representing to him how much her lively society contributes to the happiness of an old couple, who are soon to be separated from all they love on earth."

"My dear sir Charles," said lady Egerton, addressing her husband, "the consent of our young friend to remain with us must be obtained before we present our second petition to Miss Belvington."

Caroline sprung forwards, threw herself

self upon the ottoman at the feet of lady Egerton, and pressing the hand now extended towards her with animated fervour to her lips, exclaimed—"Either petition, request, or command from you, my dear madam, will be most cheerfully, most delightedly, complied with by us both."

Lady Egerton affectionately kissed the polished forehead of her young favourite, as she united with sir Charles and their young relatives in expressing the pleasure her answer had given them.

"And now, my dear Elinor," said the dowager lady Egerton, "you and I must take our own affairs a little into consideration. We are not, I find, to expect the excellent charioteer who drove us hither will take us either to Ashgrove or Rosebroook again; but my brother's steady old Ambrose will supply his place; it will therefore be necessary for us to leave this good company a day sooner than we had fixed; and that

 poor

poor Ambrose may not be too much fatigued, we shall rest one night at ——, and on the following morning shall, I hope, be enabled to proceed to Mr. Montague's, as we originally intended."

"Have you then given up your intention of returning into Hampshire this autumn?" said Caroline to Mr. Egerton.

"Oh yes," replied Emily, laughing, "my uncle Charles could on no account think of leaving home at present; I assure you he will be detained at Alborough for some weeks on business the most important."

Mr. Egerton's colour deepened at this reply, and turning hastily from his laughing niece towards Elinor, he said —"You will find excellent accommodations at ———, where the marquis of L——— has lately erected a very comfortable inn, and the village is exactly half-way from hence to Ashgrove."

Sir Charles now advised his sister to

proceed

proceed at once to the marquis's abode; but lady Egerton declined this proposal, though both Emily and Caroline assured her it would be an excellent plan, would extremely gratify the marquis and his whole family, and they were convinced Elinor would greatly prefer it to remaining at an inn. Elinor, however, affirmed they were totally mistaken, and lady Egerton being soon convinced her plan was the most approved, advised the former to write that evening to her mother, and inform her of this new arrangement.

Mrs. Davenport followed Elinor to her apartment, and apologised for her intrusion by saying she wished to inform her of the plan she had been thinking of for conveying Caroline back to Rosebrook, if Mrs. Belvington would allow of their detaining her at Alborough till November. "It is then my intention," she continued, "to visit Hampshire and pass a few weeks at Rosebrook with

my kind aunt, having first placed Maria with an intimate friend of mine in town, who intends taking a few pupils, and under her instruction my poor girl will, I hope, derive great benefit. If Mrs. Belvington has no objection to Caroline's accompanying me to London," continued Mrs. Davenport, "we could from thence, and under the escort of my brother, proceed to Rosebrook, where I hope again to have the pleasure of meeting you."

Elinor having expressed her gratitude for this kind proposal, which she assured Mrs. Davenport would meet her mother's approbation, hastened to write her letter, and return to the party she had left in the drawing-room.

The letter-bag was soon after brought in; and as sir Charles threw the packet it contained on the table, Elinor immediately recognised, in one of the letters addressed to her, the handwriting of lady Ormsby. Caroline's quick eye had

also discovered it, and immediately taking it up, and presenting it to her sister, with one of her archest glances, said—"Foreign and domestic intelligence, I believe!"

Elinor, blushing deeply, hastily deposited her friend's epistle in her netting-box, which she resolved upon not opening again till she arrived at Ashgrove; but unfortunately Caroline recollected, when they had retired to their room, having thrown her netting also into the box; and as it was a purse she intended giving to Mrs. Davenport, Elinor was obliged once more to open the lid, and Emma's letter again appeared. It was a temptation no longer to be resisted, and in a few minutes she was enabled to inform the inquisitive Caroline that general Clarenville was not yet returned to England, though his arrival was daily expected.

Caroline declaring herself perfectly satisfied with this intelligence, hastened to

to bed; but Elinor still continued in the dressing-room, employed in deciphering a postscript Emma had added to her letter, but had afterwards endeavoured to render illegible by carefully marking over it with her pen. To a careless and indifferent correspondent the attempt would not have been unsuccessful, but Elinor's eye on the first glance caught the word "brother," and after half-an-hour's patient study she was enabled to decipher the following sentence—"My mother has just received a letter from my dear father, dated ———. Where my brother *now* is I cannot determine, but I hope we shall see the former in a few days."

Another half-hour was consumed in meditation, when the voice of Caroline, entreating her to remember the early hour lady Egerton intended to leave Alborough, made Elinor start from the reverie she had unconsciously been indulging; but although she immediately retired,

retired, it was not to rest, for Emma's suppressed and imperfect intelligence had totally "murdered sleep," and the night was spent in endeavouring, though vainly, to unravel the mystery it contained.

CHAPTER V.

CAROLINE arose not on the following morning in her usually-high spirits; she was too sincerely attached to her sister not to experience great regret at their approaching separation, and when the parting moment arrived, almost regretted she had consented to remain at Alborough.

Sir Charles and lady Egerton bade Elinor a most truly-kind farewell; the younger members of their family were

 equally

equally sincere in the friendly regrets they expresssed at parting with her; and Elinor, affectionately embracing her tearful sister, and promising to write to her immediately on her arrival at Ash-grove, hastened to follow lady Egerton to the carriage.

"Remember, Charles," said the latter to her nephew, in a low voice, after he had assisted Elinor and herself into it, "we have relied upon the promise you gave Mr. Belvington."

"And which, be assured, my kind aunt," he replied, affectionately pressing her hand, "shall be most strictly adhered to;" then cordially shaking the extended hand of Elinor, and repeating his wishes of a pleasant journey, Mr. Egerton closed the carriage-door, and old Ambrose drove off at his own sober pace.

"One thing surprises me extremely, my dear madam," said Elinor to lady Egerton,

Egerton, when they had recovered a little from the agitation a parting farewell from friends we love ever occasions.

"Has any remembrance of our absent friends excited that sensation?" inquired the latter, smiling.

"Yes," replied Elinor, blushing at the arch look of her old friend, "I cannot help feeling surprised at Mr. Egerton's being so delighted at Caroline's remaining at Alborough, where he is interdicted from mentioning to her the subject which evidently engrosses his whole mind, whereas, had he now returned with her into Hampshire, his suspense might have been much sooner terminated."

"You were not then aware it would have been impossible for my nephew to have accompanied us to Rosebrook at present, as my brother, at this season of the year, always requires his assistance in settling many accounts with his steward, tenants, &c. Was it not, there-

fore, very natural that Charles should wish for the society of a lively companion, whose gaiety of heart would lighten his cares, and give a greater zest to his hours of relaxation?"

"Your explanation is most clear and satisfactory," returned Elinor, smiling, "and I shall never again dare to question the wisdom or foresight of Mr. Egerton."

They now again relapsed into silence; Elinor's thoughts soon reverted to the erased postscript in her friend's letter. General Clarenville was then returned to England—intelligence which Emma must have been convinced she much wished to hear, if only for the sake of Mrs. Clarenville, whose anxiety on her son's and husband's account lady Ormsby must have been aware she would be most truly delighted to hear was relieved; yet this intelligence Emma had refused to give her—what motive could possibly have induced her to obliterate it,

it, and where also did she imagine her brother *now* was?

It was an easy task for Elinor to repeat these questions almost momentarily to herself, but there was rather more difficulty in solving them to her satisfaction; and at length finding the subject each passing moment involved in deeper obscurity, she had formed the wise resolution of dismissing it entirely from her mind, as the carriage entered the village of ——, and lady Egerton informed her taciturn companion, whose meditations she had till then kindly forborne to interrupt, they were nearly arrived at the conclusion of their first day's journey; and soon after, old Ambrose drew up his horses at the inn-door, over which the noble marquis's arms were most *splendidly emblazoned.*

Evening was rapidly closing on the second day of our travellers' journey, when Elinor again caught the well-remembered view of Ashgrove Lodge.

 Each

Each moment now presented, though indistinctly, objects most familiar to her eye; the water of the lake glittered in the moonbeam, and by its light she discerned also the little thatched boathouse where her favourite bark was moored.

The voice of Mr. Montague, as the carriage-door opened, welcoming her again to Ashgrove, first awakened Elinor's almost spell-bound faculties; and as she entered with him and lady Egerton the drawing-room where Mrs. Montague was sitting, she involuntarily looked around for those friends she had been accustomed to see there assembled, and a sigh of disappointment escaped her, as she recollected how far distant they were from thence. The benevolent smile of her beloved general, the grateful one of his wife, the affectionate Emma, and her now-happy husband, were no longer waiting her approach: another smile too, a not-less-animated or expressive one, recurred to her recollection; but Mrs. Montague's

tague's expressions of pleasure at again seeing her prevented her dwelling upon the remembrance, and now she could not forbear smiling at the altered manner of that lady towards her since they last parted in that drawing-room.

The cool expressions of regret at losing her, and the faint pressure of the hand which accompanied the last farewell, were now strikingly contrasted by the cordial embrace, and the repeated exclamations of delight which Mrs. Montague declared she most truly felt at seeing her dear cousin again at Ashgrove. Elinor was perfectly aware of the cause that had produced this excessive cordiality. It was not the insignificant *Elinor Belvington* whose presence drew from Mrs. Montague these most flattering expressions of regard: it was the chosen companion and goddaughter of lady Egerton—the Miss Belvington who had been one of the most

favoured

favoured guests at Alborough Hall, and whom the marquis of L—— and his son lord Mowbray had declared one of the most beautiful girls they had ever seen, that produced this wonderful alteration; and Elinor was soon delightedly informed his lordship was expected to dinner on the morrow.

"How can you, Elinor, look so cruelly indifferent to these happy tidings?" said Mr. Montague, in a tone of affected reproach; "is your heart then never to receive another impression?"

"Never, I believe," said lady Egerton, a little archly.

"Elinor," continued Mr. Montague, "you ought not, at any rate, after the havoc your graceful dancing and fascinating manners have made in poor Mowbray's heart, to continue that look of indifference. Nay, nay, the smile of ridicule that now succeeds only aggravates the offence; it is more heart-

wounding

wounding than the arrows of Cupid himself, who was most terribly busy, I suspect, that evening at Alborough."

"When I am convinced," returned Elinor, laughing, "of my charms having been the unfortunate cause of so much mischief, you shall no longer have reason to style me a cruel fair one, as I promise you to exert all the art I am mistress of in extinguishing again the life-destroying flame I have raised."

"The attentions of such a man as lord Mowbray," said Mrs. Montague, eagerly, "any woman may be proud of having received."

"To be distinguished by the son of a marquis," returned Elinor, smiling, "ought not—perhaps I should say, cannot be otherwise than flattering; yet I must add, except that most powerful recommendation, I saw nothing particular in lord Mowbray to excite my admiration. Ah! my dear cousin," she laughingly continued to Mr. Montague, "I can

can perfectly understand the meaning that incredulous look and wise shake of the head are intended to convey; yet still I cannot alter my opinion."

"Ply me, try me, ere you ever fly me," gaily sang Mr. Montague, as he presented her with a cup of coffee, and then again sang—"You'll change your note to-morrow."

The morrow came, and Elinor, accompanied by lady Egerton, joined Mr. Montague at his breakfast-table. "Welcome once again, my fair coz!" he exclaimed, after addressing lady Egerton, "to my lately-solitary *déjeuné*. Old times seem returned, and when again the door opens, it will be, I hope, to admit my favourite Emma, my old companions, general and Mrs. Clarenville, or my young friend Alfred."

Elinor involuntarily looked towards the door, and started as it that moment opened to admit——the footman only with the urn.

"Why,

"Why, I really believe, Elinor," said Mr. Montague, laughing, "you cried just now—I had conjured them all here, and fully expected to behold them enter instead of poor old Robert."

"No, indeed," replied Elinor, blushing, but attempting to laugh, "I never took you for a conjurer."

"What then made you start so very theatrically? did you hope to see lord Mowbray, towards whom I hope a night's reflection has softened your flinty heart?"

"A night's reflection might perhaps have produced such an effect; but to own the truth, mine was passed in a far less noble manner, in sound and refreshing sleep, from which I never awoke till Alice this morning entered my room, with the information of breakfast being nearly ready."

"You will, I fear, be styled a dull, heavy-heady mortal," said lady Egerton, smiling, "and poor lord Mowbray, by

your

your account, is likely to become equally heavy-hearted."

"I entertain no such fear," cried Mr. Montague; "no, my dear madam, take my word for it, Elinor will soon change her tone, and his lordship's approach will be greeted with one of her most brilliant blushes, and a smile so expressive of delight that even the heart of her timid, apprehensive lover, will bound with mingled hope and joy; for it will be impossible to mistake the flattering approbation her looks will convey. But you passed by his lordship's residence yesterday; surely, Elinor, you gave him some secret intelligence of it."

"No, my dear sir," replied lady Egerton, laughing, "I confined Elinor in my apartment from the time we entered till we descended again on the following morning to the carriage, which happily conveyed us past the marquis's without discovery."

Mr. Montague inveighed most bitterly

ly at this cruelty, and continued rallying Elinor upon her noble conquest, till she interrupted him by proposing to shew lady Egerton the grounds before Mrs. Montague arose—a proposal he willingly assented to, and accordingly, after breakfast, they sallied forth on their walk.

"Which way shall we take, Elinor?" said her cousin, as he offered an arm to each of his companions.

"Oh, to my favourite woods!" she replied; "their foliage is now more beautiful than ever; and lady Egerton has frequently heard me descant most eloquently upon their picturesque appearance."

"To the woods then," repeated Mr. Montague, and the trio directed their steps thither. Lady Egerton was extremely delighted with her walk, and they continued their progress till the bridge leading to the grotto appeared before them.

"If

"If I am not very much mistaken," said lady Egerton, "we are approaching your Nereid's cave; does not yonder bridge overshadow it?"

"It certainly does," replied Mr. Montague, "and you must, I think, have caught a glimpse of one of its fair inhabitants, or you never could have ascertained so exactly the precise situation of their abode."

"One of their fair visitors has so repeatedly and accurately described it to me, that each step towards her favourite cave appears familiar to me; and this is the descent to it," continued her ladyship, as she approached the bank; "and I was confident we were to turn this way," she added, as Mr. Montague, having assisted her down the steps, led the way to the grotto.

"This is indeed a most beautiful spot!" exclaimed lady Egerton; "what an able delineator you are, Elinor! not one of its various beauties has escaped your

your observation, and the sketch you drew of them was a most faithful one. Your favourite water-lily," she continued, advancing towards the stream, "is no longer in bloom, but its broad polished leaves still remain to remind us of its former beauty. And what a beautiful tree this is!" raising her eyes to the one they were standing under, and which Elinor had already recognised as the one Clarenville had supported himself by, when he procured her the well-remembered specimen of her favourite plant.

After remaining some time in the grotto, which excited similar expressions of admiration from lady Egerton, Mr. Montague said to her—"I can no longer allow you to continue here; you must not deny me the pleasure of exhibiting my greenhouse to you; it is at present my hobby-horse, and contains some very rare plants."

Lady Egerton having declared she

was

was equally partial to her own, followed her conductor from the grotto; but Elinor lingered beside her favourite willow; each passing moment rendered the spot dearer to her; she bent over the stream, gazed upon the luxuriant plant still flourishing in it, and fancied she could distinguish the stem from which Clarenville had gathered the flower she had most carefully preserved. Again she raised her eyes to the tree which overshadowed it, and memory presented to her view the graceful figure of Clarenville, supported by a bough that hung over the stream, and which her eye soon discovered to be the one he had sprung upon. Elinor surveyed it with an undefinable emotion; at length she raised her hand, and gathered a little sprig which she involuntarily raised to her lips; but the next moment starting, and deeply blushing, she threw it from her, and angry with herself for giving way to such romantic folly, she turned hastily

from

from the tree, and saw Clarenville standing at the entrance of the grotto.

A faint exclamation escaped her; she threw her arm around the bole of the tree, and sunk overpowered by agitation against it. Clarenville darted forwards, and caught her in his arms, as she was sinking from the support she could no longer retain.

He bore her to the grotto, and throwing himself beside her on the rustic bench, whilst his supporting arm still encircled her waist, in an agitated tone exclaimed—"Elinor, dearest, most beloved Elinor, will you not speak to me? will you not welcome me again to England, which I so lately quitted, a miserable heart-riven wanderer?"

Elinor answered not; she disengaged herself from his support, and attempted to rise; but as Clarenville gently detained her, she turned aside her pale and agitated countenance, and sinking again upon the bench, burst into tears.

"Elinor,"

"Elinor," again exclaimed Clarenville, his voice rendered almost inarticulate from emotion, and taking the hand she had withdrawn, "have I then so deeply offended that you will not answer—will not even look at me? Do you still remember with displeasure the involuntary, unguarded expressions I uttered when last we parted? Will you not forgive me for hastening back to England immediately after the blissful intelligence reached me of your engagement with Mortimer being dissolved, and that I seek to hear from your own lips, whether my heart, long so wholly and devotedly your own, may hope to lose some portion of the misery it has so long sustained? Oh! in pity, Elinor, decide my fate, for this suspense is most dreadful!"

"How could you possibly obtain the information of major Mortimer's marriage?" exclaimed the agitated, surprised, and now-alarmed Elinor, as ge-

neral

neral Clarenville, and the knowledge he had attained of the state of her heart flashed across her mind.

"It was my father," he replied, "who kindly sought me to communicate the happy tidings; he has been my soothing, cheering companion back to England, and is now at Ashgrove."

"General Clarenville here, at Ashgrove!" exclaimed Elinor, again starting from her seat, in breathless alarm; "Gracious Heaven! he has then betrayed to you——" Elinor gasped for breath, clasped her hands together, and, in almost-agonized emotion, added—"Cruel, unkind general!"

"Cruel, unkind!" repeated the voice of general Clarenville, who now himself appeared at the entrance of the grotto: "Elinor, my darling child!" he continued, as springing to his arms she hid her burning face in his bosom, "how have I merited such a reproach? Alfred, inform

MAHARAJA SERFOGI'S SARASWATI

form me, if you can, what the cause is of this violent agitation, and why I am thus cruelly stigmatized?"

"Alas! I am equally ignorant with yourself," Clarenville mournfully replied; "one thing only I can too plainly discover, that we have both deeply, though unconsciously, offended Elinor: she turns in anger from me, and it was my information alone of your being at Ashgrove, that drew from her the exclamation you now overheard."

General Clarenville started, but remained silent; Elinor's perturbation appeared each moment to increase, which Clarenville, in almost-agonized emotion, observing, exclaimed, as he wrung the hand of his father—"Let me entreat you, my dear sir, to discover, and, if possible, remove the cause of this most alarming agitation, which I can no longer bear to witness. Exert the influence you alone possess over the heart of

of Elinor; plead for your son also, and obtain his forgiveness equally with your own."

Clarenville then hastily retreated from the grotto to the willow, against which Elinor had before rested, and which now became his support.

A silence of some moments succeeded his departure: Elinor still concealed her face on the bosom of her supporter; and as his arms fondly encircled her, pressing her tenderly to his heart, the general at length said—"Why this excessive agitation, my sweet love? Is it from the unwillingness you feel to wound the heart of my poor Alfred, by acknowledging you cannot return the almost-idolizing regard he has so long felt for you? Grieved as I shall be to find my suspicions confirmed, yet let me entreat you, my best love, not to add the torture of suspense to those sufferings my beloved son has already endured. That he has long and most ardently loved you,

my darling child, you surely cannot for a moment doubt; and although hopeless, and not daring, until very lately, even to wish his regard would ever be returned, it has neither from time or circumstance suffered diminution. Tell me, then, my own ingenuous Elinor, child of my affections, and equally dear to my heart as my Emma or my Alfred! tell me if you can reward the latter with a treasure he would prize more than his own existence? Whichever way you decide, let poor Alfred's suspense terminate; and although a negative will convey the severest disappointment to my heart, yet will it ever entertain the same affectionate and paternal regard for you it would delightedly cherish, were I permitted to call you indeed my daughter."

"Oh my beloved general Clarenville," exclaimed the blushing, agitated Elinor, throwing her arms around his neck, and still hiding her face on his bosom, "kind,

"kind, delicate, and consoling as your language and manner is to my heart, yet it cannot efface from my remembrance our last conversation. Oh no!" she continued, tears of wounded delicacy streaming from her eyes, "that involuntary acknowledgment has for ever degraded me in my own esteem—must have most essentially lowered me in yours, and will eventually in that of—another."

"If the recollection of our last meeting distresses you so much," said the general, tenderly kissing the weeping Elinor, "banish it, my sweet love, for ever from your memory; and let us now think only of poor Alfred, and, if possible, restore peace to his heart, by informing him of the sentiments he at present much fears will never be experienced for him."

Elinor started in joyful surprise from the bosom of her attached friend, and

 raising

raising her expressive eyes to his, exclaimed, in a voice almost inarticulate from emotion—"Tell me again, my beloved general, that Clarenville is still a stranger to that almost-agonizingly-remembered scene, and I shall indeed be happy!"

"Be happy then, my sweet child," said the general, smiling, and again delightedly pressing her to his bosom, "in the solemn assurance I now give you of no one (my beloved wife only excepted) being acquainted with what then passed between us; she alone was the participator of the anguish I experienced on finding one only bar (yet that apparently insurmountable) was opposed to our mutual wishes; and need I add, she as sincerely partook of the joy that filled my heart upon learning that bar was removed? And now, my Elinor," continued the general, tenderly kissing the soft forehead of his darling, "will you add

add to the debt of gratitude my Alfred's mother owes you, by making him and his father happy?"

Elinor again, though timidly, raised her blushing countenance, but it hastily again sought the refuge it had quitted, as she perceived Clarenville beside her. No longer able to remain absent, he had returned to the entrance, and had overheard his father's last request, when springing forwards, he gently took the hand of his beloved Elinor, and pressing it to his lips, repeated—"Will you make Alfred and his father happy?"

"Yes, my dearest son," exclaimed the general, an almost-heavenly smile illuminating his fine expressive countenance, "our sweet Elinor must not, will not, refuse our united supplication. Take then, my Alfred," he continued, "this lovely burthen from me, and endeavour to obtain forgiveness for yourself and for your father, who now ventures

to pronounce his blessing on you both, as his future equally-beloved children."

"Can this be possible?" exclaimed Clarenville, as he pressed the agitated Elinor to his throbbing heart—"is there indeed such happiness in store for me? Oh! surely, my father, you have not deceived me?"

"I trust not," returned the general, "but Elinor alone can confirm your hopes; and to her tribunal," he continued, as he left the grotto, "and the wishes of our Rosebrook friends, I must now commit you."

Elinor started at the mention of that loved name, and after a moment's silence, in a low trembling voice, said—"Have you been in Hampshire lately?"

"I left Rosebrook the evening before last. Disappointed in the expectation of finding my beloved Elinor there, I hastened forwards to the spot where my revered Mrs. Belvington assured me I should

should meet her darling child, who would then relieve the fears, or terminate the hopes, I loved, but scarcely dared, to cherish."

"And did hope or fear prevail as you approached?" said the blushing, though half-smiling Elinor, as she timidly raised her hitherto-downcast eyes to those of Clarenville, which sparkled with the brightest animation as he replied—"I cannot exactly analyse the feelings I then endured; but now, I own, hope alone prevails. Will my beloved Elinor," he continued, again raising the hand he held to his lips, "will my sweet friend confirm the happiness that now beams upon a heart which has for many months been a stranger to its influence? Oh! could you know the anguish I have felt, the agony my heart was wrung with, when I last parted from you, as I then thought for ever, your gentle nature would lead you to pity and relieve the sufferings I have endured."

 "Clarenville,"

"Clarenville," said Elinor, in low though soft accents, as her blushing cheek sought concealment on his shoulder, "I believe you have indeed suffered much for my sake; and if the assurance of my regard conveys any pleasure to your heart, believe me it is wholly yours."

The animated expressions of delight and gratitude with which the now-happy Clarenville replied to this sweet though almost-inarticulate assurance, were at length interrupted by Elinor's inquiring if he had not brought a letter from some of their Rosebrook friends?

Clarenville acknowledged Mrs. Belvington had entrusted one to his care, but he would not allow Elinor to claim it till he had once more repeated his grateful effusions for the kindness with which she had listened to him; then again reverting to the anguish his heart had sustained when last they parted, he continued to retrace the bitter pangs it had

had endured, from the moment he first discovered her engagement with Mortimer, to the evening of his leaving S——. Elinor listened in pitying silence; and at length Clarenville had the exquisite happiness (though his heart upbraided him for the selfish joy it bounded with) of drawing from the almost-weeping Elinor the delightful acknowledgment of the unhappiness he then endured having been reciprocal; and ere long he had gathered from her the most interesting particulars relative to her engagement with Mortimer, and learnt to love her even more fervently than before, on discovering the rectitude of heart and steadiness of principle which had taught her to sacrifice her own happiness to ensure that of her father.

Clarenville's heart too deeply felt the excellence of his beloved Elinor to allow his voice to be eloquent in her praise; yet the latter felt assured his silence proceeded not from indifference, for the

tender, animated expression of his countenance, as in sweet and entire confidence she now raised her soft blue eye to his, spoke volumes to her heart; but wishing to withdraw his attention from a subject which was still painful to her recollection, she again entreated him to give her the letter he had been charged with.

Taking one from his bosom, Clarenville held it towards her, and half-smiling, said—"I requested Mrs. Belvington to furnish me with credentials that might answer any *mal-à-propos* inquiry from Mr. Montague, should I not be fortunate enough to meet with you at Ashgrove, on the departure I meditated taking immediately from hence, in order to join you wherever lady Egerton had fixed her station."

Elinor could not avoid smiling at this provident plan; but eagerly taking her mother's letter, she tore it hastily open, and tears of gratitude and delight sprang

to

to her eyes, as she read the affectionate wishes it contained for her felicity, the fullest and most entire approbation of her choice, and a fervent and affecting prayer that it might ensure the happiness she so much rejoiced in. "Your father's sentiments," continued Mrs. Belvington, "are the same as my own; the son of general Clarenville can alone reward you, my darling Elinor, for the sufferings your filial affection has caused you; and your other dear parent only waits to fold his excellent child to his grateful, affectionate heart, ere he expresses sentiments so consonant to my own."

Elinor's attention appeared to Clarenville so long and wholly engrossed by her mother's letter, that at length he ventured to entreat she would defer reading the rest of it a little longer. Then playfully attempting to take it from her, smiling said—"You have already forgotten the most particular injunction

junction it contains: does not the writer request her letter may be submitted to the perusal of the bearer?"

"Oh, no," returned Elinor, blushing, though smiling through her tears, "my mother would not wish your vanity to be raised equally to the curiosity which you have now displayed, and the former would infallibly happen, were I to gratify the latter."

"My vanity," cried the delighted Clarenville, "I defy even Mrs. Belvington to raise higher than her sweet daughter has this morning done; yet with pride, with pleasure, I acknowledge, that the approbation of my Elinor's mother will still more effectually confirm the happiness my heart is now filled with."

Elinor could now no longer refuse parting from her letter; and as he read it, each succeeding line was hailed by her grateful Clarenville with redoubled transport; and delightedly pressing the letter to his lips, ere he returned it, he exclaimed—

claimed—"Kind, beloved, and partial Mrs. Belvington! it shall ever be my earnest endeavour to deserve the treasure you condescend to entrust to my keeping, and how does it delight my heart, that I alone am thought worthy of the precious gift! Teach me, my Elinor," he continued, again throwing his arm around her, "teach me to express the gratitude with which my heart overflows, and by your assurances convince your inestimable parents it is most sincere."

Elinor's beautifully-blushing countenance was again reclining on the shoulder of her lover, and Clarenville, in eager expectation, was awaiting the accents which seemed to hang on her lips, when the sound of approaching voices made her hastily start from the arm that still encircled her, and involuntarily spring towards the door; but distinguishing the voice of Mr. Montague in conversation with another gentleman, and hearing their

their footsteps on the bridge, she again retreated a few paces, and awaited their entrance in breathless, fearful expectation; for in the companion of Mr. Montague she had recognised the voice of lord Mowbray.

In a few minutes she breathed again with freedom; the gentlemen had crossed the bridge, and to her great delight the echo of their steps died upon her ear, and convinced her they had walked on towards the woods; but fearful they might return that way, she entreated Clarenville not to detain her any longer. He immediately drew her arm within his own, and led her from the grotto; but pausing a moment by the well-remembered willow, he gazed so earnestly at it and on the stream which flowed beneath, that Elinor started in conscious alarm, and brightly blushing, though half-smiling, she exclaimed—"Answer me one question, Clarenville. Had you observed me many moments on this

spot

spot before I discovered your near vicinity?"

"Not many," he smilingly replied, "and during those few seconds my senses were too much bewildered to allow of my accurately discerning the object which appeared to engross your attention. But now," he continued, with increasing animation, "perception is more alive; and yonder I can distinguish," pointing down the stream as he spoke, "a treasure that the envious waters would fain deprive me of."

Elinor's brilliant blush betrayed her consciousness of the object he alluded to; and as Clarenville declared his intention of pursuing the course of the stream till he was enabled to gain the prize, she broke off a similar sprig from the same bough, and after sportively raising it to her lips, playfully extended it towards him. Eagerly seizing the precious gift, and delightedly kissing the still more precious hand that offered

it.

it, Clarenville carefully secured the treasure it had presented in his bosom; and as he passed the bush from which Emma had snatched the rosebud she had adorned Elinor's hair with, he exclaimed—"I have now a companion to another invaluable prize, which has never, from the moment it came into my possession, been absent from my heart."

Elinor, surprised, inquired his meaning; and as he repeated to her the observation of sir Edward, and the warning he had given him, when he placed the bud in his bosom, Elinor was enabled, for the first time, fully to understand the frequent allusions Ormsby had made to the Provence rose; and Clarenville then informed her the suspicions of his brother-in-law, relative to his attachment to her, were from that moment converted into certainty.

"You have acknowledged," returned Elinor, smiling, "the truth of sir Edward's observation; take care my pre-

sent

sent is not equally ominous; a garland of willow is an emblem too well known, though I confess it is sometimes worn not very unwillingly."

"And yet, consoling as that information is," cried the happy Clarenville, "I trust my Elinor will not bid me wear the ill-fated wreath; its colour will never become my complexion."

Elinor's sweet smile assured him he might dispel that apprehension, and again they continued their walk.

On approaching the house, they perceived Mr. Montague, the general, and lord Mowbray, walking on the lawn; and Elinor immediately disengaging her arm from Clarenville's, would have retreated, and by a different path gained the private entrance to the lodge, but Mr. Montague had already observed her; and as he repeated her name too loudly for her to pretend deafness to the sound, she was obliged, though unwillingly, to turn back and meet him. Now, rapidly

advancing

advancing with lord Mowbray, he exclaimed against her cruelty in thus seeking to avoid them, and accused Clarenville of having spirited her into the measure.

Elinor at length, though still deeply blushing, recovered herself sufficiently to answer lord Mowbray's inquiries relative to her health, and his many earnest hopes she had taken no cold at the Alborough ball, &c. &c. all of which having answered much to his lordship's satisfaction, Elinor ventured to inquire of her cousin if Mrs. Montague was yet visible; and receiving an answer in the affirmative, said she would return to the house, and join her friends in the drawing-room; then, by a look entreating Clarenville to remain with the gentlemen, hastened from them, though not before she had caught an arch glance from Mr. Montague, as he gravely assured her the ladies would be extremely happy to see her, and that she had more

than

than once been inquired for in the course of the morning.

Meeting old Alice as she was proceeding to the drawing-room, and learning from her lady Egerton had retired to her own apartment, Elinor hastened thither; and throwing herself into the arms of her beloved godmother, received her affectionate congratulations on the events of the morning.

Lady Egerton had been prepared by the general for the information which the blushing, agitated, though happy Elinor, now imparted. "Heaven bless you! my sweet child," continued her ladyship, kissing her with maternal fondness, "and make you as happy, even in this world, as you deserve!

"And now, my dear Elinor," said lady Egerton, after a few minutes' silence, during which they had mutually endeavoured to regain a little more composure, "you have no objection to returning home by Elmsly Park."

"Will

"Will our visit there," inquired Elinor, with some little degree of hesitation, "detain us many days from Rosebrook?"

"Can you not, my dear Elinor," returned lady Egerton, "sacrifice a few days to gratify the wishes of your kind friend, general Clarenville? After all the fatigue he has cheerfully endured to promote your happiness, is it not making him rather an ungrateful return, to hesitate complying with a request which we cannot consider an unreasonable one? Neither is it very surprising that he should wish to see his wife and daughter after his long absence."

"Has not the general seen Mrs. Clarenville since his return to England?" inquired Elinor, starting in surprise; "surely, my dear madam, you must be mistaken."

"I repeat only his own words, and the particular request he has this morning made, that we would accompany him

him to Elmsly, which would give Mrs. Clarenville the additional pleasure of embracing as a daughter her darling Elinor."

"Oh! forgive the momentary selfishness which made me hesitate," returned Elinor; "and indeed, my dear lady Egerton, I was at that moment thinking more of my mother's gratification than my own, for I most earnestly wish to see our Elmsly friends again, that I may, in some degree, exculpate myself from the charge of ingratitude, which they must think me guilty of, on finding I preferred a visit at Ashgrove to returning to them. My kind Mrs. Clarenville, particularly, had reason to feel hurt at my conduct, for she had ever distinguished me by the most marked partiality; and yet I refused to accept her daughter's pressing invitation to return again to Elmsly, although the latter, more than once, hinted to me how much

much comfort my society would afford her dear mother."

"I think you may very reasonably hope to obtain both Mrs. Clarenville's and Emma's forgiveness," returned lady Egerton, "if you will sue for it in person: we shall take with us two most special pleaders, and I promise, if the cause appears desperate, to assist them with all my eloquence. If then you will allow me to consider that affair settled, I will proceed to another, in which I think you have subjected yourself to the same terrible charge. I mean," continued her ladyship, smiling, to dispel the look of alarmed surprise Elinor's countenance now expressed, "in not having repaid me, even by one poor thank, for directing Clarenville this morning where to find you."

"I can never, my beloved lady Egerton," replied Elinor, affectionately kissing her, "even in the slightest degree, repay

repay you for the unvarying kindness with which, from my infancy, you have ever distinguished me; but I knew not you had so lately given me a fresh cause for gratitude. Where, my dear madam, did you this morning meet our newly-arrived friends?"

"At a very little distance from the grotto," replied lady Egerton; "but," she continued with a smile, "I cannot say one of our *new* friends was then in the politest mood; for although I offered him my hand, and congratulated him upon his safe return to England, he neither took the offered pledge, nor replied to the friendly greeting, but eagerly exclaimed—'Is not Elinor with you?' Too angry with him to answer, I merely pointed to the grotto, and in another moment he vanished from my view.

"From the more polite general I then learned his son and himself had landed a few days ago at ——, and

 since

since that time they had literally *lived* upon the road, except the few hours' rest our old friend procured at Rosebrook, and two more he begged for at ——, in their way hither, to the great annoyance of his son, who, feeling no inclination for rest himself, was surprised, if not angry, at so strange a request. But unwilling to proceed without his father, whose influence he thought might be requisite, Clarenville managed to wait for the space of an hour and a half with tolerable patience; and then, completely wearied with the long nap his father had taken, and apprehending it might last three hours more, the impatient son ordered a postchaise and four horses, and determined upon setting off by himself, and leaving his father to follow at his leisure. But the loud tone in which this order was given awoke the general from his comfortable nap; he descended from his apartment just in time to enter the chaise before the door

was

was closed, and finished his dream upon the road."

Elinor would have expressed the regret she really felt at hearing general Clarenville had undergone so much fatigue on her account, but lady Egerton looked so very incredulous, that, blushing and half-laughing, she desisted from the attempt, and proceeded to inquire how much longer they were to remain at Ashgrove.

"Our poor harassed commander," replied lady Egerton, "has requested to be allowed another day to recruit his almost-exhausted strength; and then (as I have promised him two full hours' rest on the road, if he requires it) he hopes it will be in his power to proceed, and perhaps reach Elmsly on the day after to-morrow. And now, my love," continued lady Egerton, "I would advise you to hasten either your toilet or your morning visit to Mrs. Montague's

dressing-room, as the first dinner-bell has already rung."

"Dinner!" repeated Elinor, starting from her seat; "I really was not aware that time was so near."

"The hours have not flown this morning so very rapidly with me," returned lady Egerton, smiling, "for Time flies heavily when his wings are clogged with suspense; and indeed I thought at last you never meant to return."

Elinor affectionately embraced her kind friend, as she gratefully thanked her for the tender interest she had taken in her happiness; and as she was leaving the room to proceed to Mrs. Montague's, lady Egerton, detaining her a moment, said—"Should you, my love, meet with Mr. Montague, be prepared for a little raillery: Clarenville's agitation, when he first met us this morning, raised the suspicions of your cousin, and they

they were converted into certainty by the smiling, though not less agitated countenance of the general, when he rejoined us in the drawing-room after returning from the grotto. Mrs. Montague was not present, and is still ignorant of the knowledge her husband would not allow general Clarenville to deny he had attained. But you must not be angry with your cousin, Elinor; he is most sincerely attached to you, and warmly congratulated the general upon the happiness of his son; though at the same time he declared you should not lose the art of blushing, which you have so exquisitely attained, from want of practice."

"I am almost tempted to exclaim," returned Elinor, "would I were safe at Rosebrook! but, as it would be treason to think even of that refuge at present, I will pursue a wiser plan, and arm myself with fortitude sufficient to meet

 these

these unavoidable evils composedly, if not patiently."

"It is the best plan you can pursue," answered lady Egerton, smiling; "and you have my best wishes for its proving successful."

Elinor then quickly proceeded to the apartment of Mrs. Montague, and congratulated herself upon finding her alone, and in tolerable good humour; not quite pleased at having understood lord Mowbray had accepted Mr. Montague's invitation, solely from hearing Elinor was to be their guest; yet trusting, from the indifference with which the latter had received the intelligence on the preceding evening, that she had no ambition to figure as a marchioness, she received her with a smile, and accepted, with a good grace, the apologies Elinor offered for paying her so late a visit, and politely requested she would not lengthen it, lest she should be hurried in her preparations for dinner.

Elinor

Elinor gladly retreated to her own apartment, and thought herself fortunate in escaping unseen by Mr. Montague, who was then ascending the stairs, and happy to find some guests were expected from Lesford to dinner, who she hoped would, in some measure, take off his attention from herself.

CHAPTER VI.

ELINOR, as she entered the drawing-room with lady Egerton, felt not a little dread of meeting Mr. Montague's eye: but fortunately he was engaged in conversation, at some distance from the door, with several of his Lesford guests, and did not observe her entrance. In one of the female visitors Elinor immediately recognised Miss Benfield, whom she had not seen since the evening of

the ball at which they had first met. General Clarenville was conversing with her; but seeing Elinor approach he hastened to meet her, and leading her to the sofa on which Miss Benfield was sitting, placed himself beside her. Elinor felt great pleasure in renewing the acquaintance with her Lesford friend, and the animated manner of the latter assured her the gratification was reciprocal.

They continued conversing together some time, till the general, observing Elinor's eye glance across the room in search of an object who was not present, gently whispered her—"Alfred is writing to Rosebrook." The approach of lord Mowbray prevented him from saying more; and the eagerness with which the latter endeavoured to engage the attention of Elinor was observed with a smile by himself and Mr. Montague, whose eye had followed the movement of his guest, and now caught the smiling countenance of the general.

His

His lordship had not much reason to congratulate himself upon his success; Elinor scarcely appeared to attend to the history he was giving of a hair-breadth escape he had lately had. At length he had the satisfaction of finding his tale had been heard, by receiving the most sympathizing answer of—" Indeed it was very fortunate you were not killed." Elevated by this reply, his lordship endeavoured to keep alive the interest he had awakened, by dwelling with great emphasis on the circumstance, when he remarked (and whilst describing one of the greatest perils) a smile and a blush irradiate the countenance on which he expected at that moment to have perceived a far-different expression. Astonished at the effect his tale of misadventures had produced, his lordship paused; yet the smile and the blush still remained, the latter appearing each moment to become more vivid—" Come, Alfred," said the general, rising, " I will

"I will resign my seat to you," and lord Mowbray had now the mortification of finding it impossible to regain the slightest portion of that attention the wandering of which had first disturbed him.

Elinor, wholly unobservant of the anger visible in lord Mowbray's countenance, as he turned hastily from her, was listening to Clarenville, who now informed her he had ventured to write to Mr. Belvington and claim his promised sanction, "which," he continued, "I could not obtain when at Rosebrook." Elinor started in alarm, but Clarenville, with an animated smile, concluded, "yet it was to be willingly accorded, if I were allowed to claim it on my arrival at Ashgrove."

Elinor, blushing, returned his smile, and he was again on the point of addressing her, when Mr. Montague, advancing towards them, exclaimed—"If you are inclined for any dinner, good folk,

folk, I would advise you to follow me down stairs." Elinor hastened from him immediately, and took the protecting arm of general Clarenville, by whose side she determined to remain during dinner; but as she was passing Mr. Montague at the table, he caught her hand, and insisted upon her occupying the same station she had, on her former visit to Ashgrove, never deserted for another. "What particular objection," he continued, "can you now have to it? Let me tell you, Elinor, it is very unnatural to prefer the society of a stranger, as general Clarenville is comparatively to me, whom you used to call your old friend, your favourite coz. I shall not part from Elinor," he added, addressing the general, "so you may as well resign her quietly, and I promise she shall be well guarded between your son and myself: come, Alfred, help me to secure this precious treasure, and we will share her smiles equally."

 Elinor,

Elinor, blushing, and unable longer to contend, withdrew her arm from the general's, and Mr. Montague, laughing, concluded by saying, she yielded herself prisoner with a very good grace.

In the course of conversation during dinner, one of the company inquired of Miss Benfield if her intimate friend (mentioning the lady's name) was married, as he had understood she soon was to be?

"Harriet has not changed her name yet," replied Miss Benfield, "nor does she, I believe, intend it at present."

"Is the match then broken off?" said Mr. Montague. "What will become of the poor colonel, who appeared very much attached to your friend?"

"His regiment is ordered abroad, and——"

"And your friend preferred remaining in Old England," interrupted Mr. Montague. "Well," he continued, "I do not blame her choice; others have made

made the same before her, and very wisely too, in my opinion."

Miss Benfield assured Mr. Montague that was not the cause of her friend's breaking off her engagement, but he was not to be convinced. "Going so far from home, Miss Benfield," he continued, "and into wild fighting countries, as an old lady of my acquaintance very justly observes, is not a pleasant thing for nice, delicate young ladies; they had much better remain quiet in Old England, where they would soon find some one to suit their fancy, and live far happier with their chosen partner, in a milder, or at least more temperate climate."

Elinor's heightened colour passed not unobserved by Miss Benfield: she had before, through Mr. Montague, heard of her former engagement, and had already seen sufficient to convince her it was transferred to another. Feeling for the confusion which Mr. Montague

tague had caused, she now endeavoured to divert his attention, by inquiring if the report she had heard of lord Petersbrook's marriage had any foundation in truth?

"It is a tale founded on fact," replied Mr. Montague. "His lordship, as a fashionable newspaper last week informed us, has led to the altar the blooming widow of an East-Indian nabob, the late sir George Tankerville, bart."

Both Clarenville and Elinor started at the name, which they involuntarily repeated; and a gentleman who was sitting opposite, and had overheard the inquiry of Miss Benfield, with the reply of Mr. Montague, smiling, and addressing the latter, said—"You have not, my dear sir, repeated the other paragraph on the same subject, which runs thus—'The well-filled coffers of a late nabob will, it is reported, be exceedingly convenient in repairing the frequent losses a certain nobleman has lately sus-

tained on the turf, and at a house of great resort in town."

"The bride then has my sincerest pity," exclaimed Miss Benfield; "a professed gambler will make a wretched husband, and——"

"Spare your pity, my young friend," said the gentleman, interrupting her; "in this instance, at least, it is undeserved. If you are acquainted with her ladyship," he added, addressing Elinor and Clarenville, whose exclamation he had observed, "you will not be surprised at my affirming she merits not the sympathy of this young lady."

"I am only personally acquainted with her ladyship," replied Clarenville; "indeed I never saw her more than twice, but her countenance is a very remarkable one; it engaged my attention, and induced me to inquire who she was."

"Lady Petersbrook's countenance is the index of her mind," returned the gentleman;

tleman; "proud, vindictive, artful, and treacherous. You shrink from the description, my dear Miss Benfield, and think, perhaps, I am drawing the portrait in too strong colours; but had you resided in India so long as I have done, you would acknowledge I have not swerved from the truth. I am but lately returned from Calcutta, where lady Tankerville's very name is held in detestation. Her artful conduct towards sir George before marriage, and the cruel and unkind treatment he experienced during the latter years of his life, are facts too well known to be disputed; and there are many in Calcutta who could sufficiently attest to the vindictive spirit she possesses; for when once offended, she never rests till she has executed the plan of vengeance her revengeful temper suggests."

"Almost amiable creature certainly!" said Mr. Montague; "and as I have to write a congratulatory letter to Petersbrook,

brook, I shall take care to extol the excellent qualities his bride possesses, on more than one account:—first, to prevent his lordship's too soon repenting of the choice he has made; and, secondly, that the evil eye of his lady may not fix on me as her victim."

"Lord Petersbrook," returned the gentleman, "is not yet aware of the evil genius he is fettered with; for he gave himself only six weeks to become acquainted with her character."

"We certainly cannot allow he has acted very wisely," said Mr. Montague, colouring, but half-laughing. "What think you, Clarenville? I trust you will take six months, at least, before you decide."

To Elinor's great relief, Mrs. Montague at that moment rose from the table, and gladly she escaped from her tormenting cousin.

When Mr. Montague, with the other gentlemen, entered the drawing-room, he

he immediately advanced towards the sofa on which Elinor was sitting between lady Egerton and Miss Benfield; and she was congratulating herself on there not being room for him, when she heard his voice at the back of it repeat in a whisper to her—" Oh cruel Barbara Allen!"

" Is it Miss Belvington you are accusing of cruelty?" inquired Miss Benfield, smiling.

" Sorry am I, my fair lady, to answer, such is the disposition of my lovely coz; at least, that is the account one of my guests will give to the world. Think what will be the surprise of his noble relatives, when they hear the loud ringing of the portal-bell this night, to see their young lord return, who was expected to remain at Ashgrove for the space of three days at least, and to hear him declare it was the cruelty of fair Elinor which drove him from thence; for whenever he addressed her, she

would

would scarcely answer him, and would direct her whole attention to another, even when he was in the midst of a melancholy tale, which ought to have drawn tears of terror and alarm from her eyes."

"My dear cousin," exclaimed Elinor, blushing, though unable to refrain from laughing, "when will you learn to talk rationally?"

"When the age of folly is over," he replied, "which has this day arrived at its zenith;" then laughing at the deepened blush he had caused, Mr. Montague retreated, and entered into conversation with his other guests.

Cards were, as usual, the evening's amusement at Ashgrove Lodge. Elinor had never joined in it, and her not doing so this evening excited no surprise; but she entreated Clarenville not to refuse Mrs. Montague; and though accusing her of cruelty and a wish to send him from her, he could not deny her request,

as he saw how much she shrunk from Mr. Montague's raillery, and he also knew his father would be her companion.

Elinor was taking out her netting when the general whispered an entreaty to pass half-an-hour with her in Mr. Montague's study. As soon as they were seated in it, he said—" Lady Egerton has, I understand, mentioned to you, my dear child, the wish I expressed of her returning with you to Elmsly Park, that our dear friends there assembled might have another peep at their beloved Elinor; but I was so absorbed in my own selfish feelings as entirely to forget those of your respected parents, and even of my sweet child, whose wishes, I know, lean towards home, though, like herself, she would not indulge any, except those she thought likely to give gratification to her attached friends. But, my dear Elinor, you shall not this time be obliged to control your inclinations,

tions, as I intend to take you directly back to Rosebrook, and in a few days after the party from Elmsly will assemble at Willowfield; at least, so I have ordered," he smilingly continued, pointing to a letter directed to Mrs. Clarenville, "and none will dare to mutiny against their general."

"You are very kind, my dear sir," replied Elinor, gratefully pressing his hand; "but I must not allow either lady Neville or Mrs. Clarenville to be thus hurried. It cannot be otherwise than inconvenient to them, and it is very probable sir Edward and lady Ormsby will not agree to leave home at present; and as a few days cannot make a great difference either to me or my beloved parents, I must entreat you to say we return by Elmsly Park."

"It will not be inconvenient either to my sister or wife," returned the general, "as they both intended returning to Willowfield upon my arrival in England;

land; and as for Emma, if she does not wish to see you, or has not sufficient influence with her husband to persuade him to join our party, let them remain at home. Whichever way he determines, Emma will think the best, and will neither call him *cruel* nor *unkind!*"

"Oh, pray forget that foolish expression!" cried Elinor, blushing, and as the general threw his arms around her, and affectionately kissed her glowing cheek, she added—"I cannot imagine how the ideas that caused them came into my mind; but I entreat you no longer to remember those words, and let us talk of something else. How came you acquainted with what, at the time I saw Mrs. Clarenville, she appeared perfectly ignorant of?"

"If you mean Mortimer's marriage, and the consequent dissolution of your engagement, lady Neville and herself performed the part of hypocrites most successfully. They were both perfectly

well

well acquainted with it, and both urged me to hasten my journey."

"But who could possibly have informed you of it?" said Elinor, in increased surprise. "Lady Egerton has assured me she did not write to lady Neville, and no one else at Rosebrook, my own family excepted, knew of it."

"Are you quite certain Caroline did not write either to me or lady Neville?" inquired the general, smiling.

"No," replied Elinor, after a moment's consideration; "Caroline was much surprised on hearing you were absent."

"Indeed!" returned the general: "Well then, do you think the tell-tale was your father?"

"No, that I am certain it was not," cried Elinor, hastily, "for he knew nothing of——" She hesitated, blushed, and smiled, as the general sportively said—"Finish the sentence, my love."

"No, you have already done that in your

your own mind," she replied; "therefore, surely," she added, after a moment's reflection—"yes, I really begin to think it was my mother herself who informed lady Neville of it. Am I right?" she eagerly continued, "and what were the contents of her letter?"

"You are right, my fearfully-apprehensive Elinor. It was your mother who wrote my sister on the very day Mrs. Wardley's letter arrived at Rosebrook; and she likewise informed her of lady Egerton's intention of spending a day at Elmsly, as she passed it in her way to her brother's. But this, after the information the former part of her letter contained, could not be communicated either to sir Edward or our dear Emma; we were therefore obliged to practise a little deceit. Alfred's state of mind, when he left England, was, I well know, most wretched, though I hoped his excellent principles would, in time, enable him to overcome the deep impression

impression he then, as I feared, unfortunately cherished.

"I had for some days expressed uneasiness at not receiving any letters from him, and, more than once, half-seriously declared, I would take a trip over the water, and find out what he was about. Upon the receipt, therefore, of your mother's letter, it was determined, in grand council, that I should put this scheme in execution; and can you blame me, my dear Elinor, for wishing, as speedily as possible, to take one heavy weight from the mind of a son the most affectionate and dutiful parents were ever blessed with? Still poor Alfred had sufficient anxiety to render, at times, those hopes very faint which my intelligence of your emancipation had once more caused to spring in his bosom. Was I not deserving of praise to listen in silence to the half-uttered expressions of painful doubt and apprehension which frequently escaped him?"

"Oh yes," exclaimed Elinor, hastily interrupting him, "my grateful thanks are, and ever will be yours: only instruct me how I can prove the sincerity of my gratitude, and you shall be convinced, mine does not consist in professions alone."

"Let me but see you the wife of my Alfred," returned the general, pressing her with tender affection to his bosom, "and every wish of my heart will be gratified."

They continued conversing together some time, until a gentle tap at the door, followed by the entrance of Clarenville, interrupted them.

"Your half-hour is elapsed," he exclaimed, holding up his watch.

"Not by half a minute, my good friend," returned the general, taking out his, and putting it before Clarenville; "therefore you are an intruder, and, as such, must receive the punishment adequate to the offence."

Then

Then affectionately kissing Elinor, he put her hand into that of his son, and tenderly blessing his beloved children, left the apartment.

CHAPTER VII.

"Elinor," said Mr. Montague, the next morning at breakfast, "I must not have you forget our favourite old widow; she knows you are at Ashgrove, and is impatient to see her little lambkin again."

"It is my intention," returned Elinor, "to visit her this morning, and introduce lady Egerton also."

"I mean to be of your party," said the general; "therefore do not run away without me."

"And you, Alfred, will be my companion," cried Mr Montague. "Nay, do not shake your head, in token of refusal;

MAHARAJA SERFOGI'S SARA

fusal; surely you will not be so rude as to leave your noble host quite alone."

"Certainly not, my dear sir," returned Clarenville, laughing; "but, as I warn you I shall prove a very dull companion in a *tête-à-tête*, had we not better obtain permission to accompany the trio who intend bending their steps towards the widow's cottage, where you can also enjoy one of your favourite bowls of milk?"

"You have planned it most admirably," replied Mr. Montague; "and if you are as successful in the one you form for life, I shall pronounce you the most fortunate mortal in existence."

Clarenville returned the cordial pressure of the hand now offered him, and the party separated to prepare for their ramble.

As Elinor, accompanied by Clarenville, preceded lady Egerton and her beaux to the cottage, he informed her of the mistake its inhabitant had been left

under

under in their former visit, and she was therefore prepared for the exclamations of delight the old lady broke into, upon seeing them.

"Well, I always told old John Thompson," she continued, after Clarenville had called upon her for the congratulations she had before, rather too prematurely, offered, "I always told him you, sir, and only you, ought to have this dear young lady for life; she was a deal too good to be sent over seas like, and perhaps get shot or killed in those dismal places, all full of wild beasts."

Clarenville laughingly inquired if she thought Elinor would be taken for one; and Elinor added—"A tigress or wild cat, perhaps."

"Ay, God bless your sweet face," returned the old lady, "it does my heart good to see you smile; and that I should have lived to see you again, and looking so happy too, is what I shall always think upon in the same manner as

I do all the comforts my dear good master has given me; and I hope his honour's well?"

"Here comes his honour, to answer for himself," said Clarenville, pointing to the party who were entering the little garden.

Elinor now introduced her favourite to lady Egerton, who was much pleased with her venerable appearance and the neatness of the cottage.

> "The white-wash'd walls, the neatly-sanded floor,
> The varnish'd clock that click'd behind the door."

"Well, my good friend," said Mr. Montague to his old tenant, and pointing to Elinor, "there's your favourite lamb still unfettered, you perceive."

"God bless her," again repeated the good woman, as Elinor, aware of what her cousin was alluding to, proposed to show lady Egerton the beauties of the little garden; but before she could effect her escape, the old lady had added —"But

—"But I hope my sweet lamb wont be offended when I say, I should wish to live and see her led by her own true shepherd."

"Or leading him," said Mr. Montague laughing, as Elinor darted past him into the garden.

"Elinor, dearest Elinor!" said Clarenville, as quickly following; and taking her hand, pressed it between his own.

The expressive, supplicating tone was understood; and Elinor hastily said—"Oh, do not talk of that—I mean not till we are returned to Rosebrook;" and she blushed deeply as Clarenville, in an animated tone, exclaimed—"Oh! let us then begin our journey to that happy place immediately."

"To-morrow we shall be on the road thither," she half-smiling replied.

"And the next day we shall arrive at the dear parsonage," he added; "until then I will compel myself to be silent."

One of Elinor's sweetest and most ex-

pressive smiles rewarded him for this kind forbearance; and lady Egerton joining them, she pointed out to her notice the taste with which the little spot was decorated.

At length Mr. Montague, who had partaken of his favourite beverage, whilst the rest of the party ate some excellent fruit, proposed their returning home. Lady Egerton, taking his arm, bid a friendly adieu to the widow, and hastened with him from the cottage, that Elinor might be spared any farther confusion from his raillery; and the latter felt thankful he was not present to hear the old lady's blessings and wishes for her and Clarenville's united happiness, to which were added the most lively expressions of gratitude, that she had been spared to see her dear young benefactress again, and looking so well and so happy.

At an early hour on the following morning, the carriage of lady Egerton,

and

and Clarenville's curricle, which had followed him to Ashgrove, were announced to be in readiness; and Mr. Montague had again occasion to declare general Clarenville would not allow Elinor to finish her breakfast.

"But she is even more on the alert than when she last accompanied you to Rosebrook. Pray whom do you expect to meet there?" he continued, addressing Elinor. "Not lord Mowbray, I hope! Clarenville, I will be your second, if required."

Clarenville professed himself extremely obliged by the offer, and promised to call upon him, if such a dreaded rival should appear.

Elinor now, for the second time, lost sight of Ashgrove, and again had the pleasure, on the succeeding day, of pointing out to Clarenville the tower of Rosebrook church, as it rose above the thick foliage by which it was surrounded, and which autumn had not yet despoiled.

spoiled. Again did Mrs. Belvington fold her darling Elinor to her maternal bosom, and Clarenville heard repeated the sanction that had been before accorded him.

"But where is my dear father?" said Elinor, after the first emotions of delight and gratitude had subsided; "why is he not here to welcome and bless his child?"

"His children rather, dearest Elinor," said Clarenville, as he drew her from the encircling arms of her mother; and Elinor, blushing, smiled and repeated—"His children!"

"Your father," said Mrs. Belvington, smiling also, in maternal delight, "would not voluntarily have absented himself from this happy meeting, but he was sent for to pray by the bedside of, I greatly fear, a dying parishioner. And now let me ask, where have you left our dear lady Egerton and the general?"

"We

"We passed them on the road, about an hour ago," replied Clarenville; "and lady Egerton, I believe, intends coming on to the parsonage."

"Here is my dear father!" cried Elinor, and springing forwards, she threw herself on his bosom.

Mr. Belvington returned her affectionate caresses, and then, in an earnest and serious tone, continued—"Elinor, my beloved child, do you indeed feel that your happiness will be secured by the engagement you are about to enter into, and that you are not this time biassed by the wishes and inclinations of your friends? Answer me sincerely, I entreat, my sweetest child; for not till I am assured your heart is really won, will I again sanction the addresses, even of this my most esteemed young friend."

Clarenville pressed the hand now offered him to his lips, and waited, in anxious expectation, the answer of Elinor.

"My father," said Elinor, at length, in low and trembling accents, "bless, bless your happy children!"

"My blessing will for ever attend you," replied Mr. Belvington, placing the hand of Elinor in that of Clarenville; and as he pressed them between his own, he fervently called on the beneficent Being he adored, to bless and keep his children in virtue and happiness.

Elinor again threw herself into her father's arms, but once more kissing and affectionately blessing her, Mr. Belvington resigned her to those of the happy Clarenville, and hastily retreated from the room.

"How richly am I repaid for all my sufferings!" exclaimed Clarenville, as he pressed his promised lovely bride to his grateful heart. Elinor's echoed the same, and the silent, though expressive language of her eyes, revealed to her animated Alfred the happiness she felt unable to express.

The

The carriage of lady Egerton was now heard approaching, and Mrs. Belvington met her friends as they descended from it.

"I have not deserved the happiness this day has given me," she said, as she extended her hand to the eagerly-offered one of general Clarenville.

"As a wife and mother," he, with some little emotion, returned, "you deserve every blessing; and our dear Elinor is not the least a kind Providence has given you."

Mrs. Willoughby had heard of her sister's arrival from a villager who had seen her on the road, and now entered to welcome her return. Her husband, with Mr. and Mrs. Coleridge, soon followed, and a happier family than the one now assembled could not be pointed out.

"And when are we to see our dear Caroline again?" said Mrs. Belvington, smiling.

"My

"My nephew will bring her to us in the course of a month," replied lady Egerton, "with his sister Mrs. Davenport, I hope."

"Ay, that nephew of yours is a sly dog," said Willoughby, laughing; "he is more to be feared than half a hundred frank, open-hearted mortals like Clarenville and myself. But, Elinor," he continued, "had you many smart beaux at Alborough? any to put the Torpedo in alarm?"

Elinor smiled as she answered—"We had no cause for joining in the general complaint respecting the scarcity of dancing beaux; whether Caroline found them equally agreeable partners in riding, music, or conversation, she will herself inform you; I am not in her secrets."

The voice of little Edward exclaiming —"What, grandpapa, is my dear aunty indeed come back again?" now drew her to the door, and the little fellow delight-

edly

edly sprung into her arms, again and again repeating—"My dear, dear aunty, I am so happy you are come home again! And you know," he continued, looking eagerly in her face, "you promised me not to go away any more of a long, long time."

"Edward," cried Clarenville, anxious to relieve his Elinor from the confusion occasioned by the general smile her nephew's too-retentive memory made it impossible to refrain from, "Edward, have you forgotten another old friend?"

"No," he replied, leaving his aunt and jumping on the knee of Clarenville, "I love you very much still; and do you love," he continued, in a half-whisper, "do you love aunt Elinor as well as you said you did that night you sat by my bedside?"

"Why don't you speak out, Edward?" said Mr. Willoughby, laughing; "you ought not to be so rude as to whisper in company."

"Because

"Because Mr. Clarenville would be angry, perhaps, if I told every body what I said."

"No, my sweet fellow," returned Clarenville, "you may now repeat it to every body; and you are a very good boy for keeping my secret so long and so well."

"Edward is a most excellent confidante," said his mother, smiling; "he has only entrusted your secret to us all."

"It was my aunt Caroline who found it out," exclaimed Edward, the tears trembling in his eyes as he looked at Clarenville, fearing to read displeasure in his countenance.

„ Then aunt Caroline was a very wicked girl," replied Clarenville, laughing and kissing the flushed cheek of his alarmed little friend; "and do not forget to tell her so when she comes back, and that, some day or other, I shall find out and betray her secret."

"Now you have obtained your friend's

friend's forgiveness, Edward," said Mrs. Coleridge, rising, "perhaps you will like to return home with me, as grandmamma's dear Elinor is come back again."

"Has Edward then been my substitute?" inquired the latter of her mother.

"Yes," replied the little boy, looking proudly at her, "grandmamma came for me when you went away, because she said my talking would make her forget to cry for her darling child; that was what she called you, aunty. Shall you cry when I go away, grandmamma?" he continued, as he put up his little mouth to give the parting kiss.

"I shall be very sorry to part from you, my sweet child," returned Mrs. Belvington, as she affectionately kissed him; "but if you will come and see me again to-morrow, I think your aunt Elinor will make me forget to cry this time."

Edward assured her he would come, and

and bring his brother and sisters with him; then, after begging Elinor would not let grandmamma be sorry, he accompanied his mother home. Lady Egerton and the Willoughbys took leave at the same time, and the general and Mr. Belvington attended the former to her house.

"Why, my dearest mother," said Elinor, when they had all departed, again affectionately embracing her, "why did you allow me to leave you?"

"Your absence has certainly been productive of so many untoward events," replied Mrs. Belvington, smiling, "I wonder not at your feeling angry with me for doing so. But now you are returned to me again, let us not recur to past sorrows, and the next time I lose you must be entirely optional on your part."

"Elinor," cried Clarenville, as he caught her hand, "are we not now arrived at Rosebrook?"

Mrs.

Mrs. Belvington inquired his meaning, and soon understanding it, left him to draw from Elinor a promise of not unnecessarily prolonging his slavery, as she smiling told him he appeared to consider the days of courtship.

CHAPTER VIII.

A LETTER from Caroline soon arrived, in answer to the intelligence her mother had communicated to her; it was addressed to Elinor, and contained the most affectionate congratulations—"Tell brother Willoughby," she continued, "not to despise the wisdom of fifteen again. I have never yet been mistaken in those points, as I told Emily Longbourne the other day, and at length brought her to confess I was right, and that she really was engaged to her cousin

sin, Edward Dorrington. *A-propos*, Elinor, did I not inform you lord Mowbray had become your slave, and that, some day or other, you would find I was right? And his lordship has kindly contributed to my fame, as he yesterday told Mr. Egerton, in confidence (who immediately repeated it to me, under the same seal of secresy, and which I informed him I should transmit to you, exacting the like promise,) he had accepted Mr. Montague's invitation to Ashgrove, understanding you were to be his guest, that he might endeavour to impress his own sweet image on the hitherto, as Mr. Montague informed him, impenetrable heart of his fair coz. Great, therefore, was his noble lordship's disappointment and mortification at finding, before he had been an hour in your company, another was there enshrined, and that not one of your numerous smiles and blushes could be spared to him."

Caroline then proceeded to advise her sister not to let his lordship's secret rest with her, as she really thought the knowledge of it would redouble Clarenville's attention, and he would never dare, for a moment, not even in the most trivial instance, to contradict her, lest the dreaded form of the future marquis should stand before him. She then proceeded—"My pupil, as you style my playfellow Maria, continues incorrigible; nay, to own the truth, we have quarrelled, and if you are curious to learn the cause, this is it:—You remember Maria's passion for trapball; it has, since your departure, still continued in full force, and finding it impossible to draw her attention to any more serious employment, till she was completely fatigued with this, I have frequently given an hour to it in the morning, which I felt conscious was most cruelly thrown away. Mr. Egerton has generally stood my friend, and insisted upon Maria's re-

leasing

leasing me at the expiration of that time; but the other day, and a most fatal one it had nearly proved to me, he rode out with Edward Dorrington, and my allotted hour passed, and still Maria would not release me, telling me, bluntly enough, I never was in a hurry to leave Mr. Egerton. Another hour elapsed, and my protector appeared not. No longer able, from fatigue, either to strike the ball or wield the bat, I threw them from me, assuring Maria I could not continue the game, but would finish it another day. Unfortunately this was the first she had ever appeared likely to win, and she so earnestly entreated me to remain five minutes longer, when she hoped it would be decided, that I could not refuse compliance. Maria continued playing in high glee, till, unluckily for her, and still more so for me, the ball, which she struck with a most masterly hand, bounded from the ground as it had nearly reached me, and, with true malice prepense,

prepense, endeavoured to extinguish the light of one of my brilliant orbs, as lord Mowbray styles yours. Fearful it had accomplished its envious design, I rent the air with screams of horror, anguish, and despair; and my shrill notes brought two gallant knights, armed *cap-à-pié*, to my aid; but of this I was not aware, as, before their arrival, you may guess who they were: like a true heroine, I had sunk on the ground in a swoon—note, copied *verbatim* from the last new novel I read.

"Poor Maria, in the mean time, remained, as usual, with eyes and mouth wide open; at least I conclude that was her attitude, as her cousin Edward could not, for many minutes, draw from her an explanation of this tragical scene: but when at length her recollection returned, and she had given him all the information in her power, he clapped spurs to his steed, and gallopped off for a surgeon. In the interim, hartshorn and

and cold water had recalled my scattered senses, and I really believe my first inquiry was if my eye were safe in my head?

"Mrs. Davenport kindly assured me it was; but still my curiosity was not satisfied, and I insisted upon peeping from under the bandage that had been tied over it. The sight of Mr. Egerton, who I then found to be my supporter on the sofa, to which he had conveyed me when insensible, immediately convinced me his sister had not deceived me; and the recollection of poor Maria darting across my mind, I sprung from my recumbent posture, and entreated permission to return and seek her; but I was requested not to move till the surgeon's arrival; I therefore waited with as much patience as I could summon, my poor eye still concealed from view and my now-aching head resting on the shoulder of Mrs. Davenport, till this notable personage made his appear-

ance,

ance, and proclaimed aloud the glad tidings of the *orb* having escaped uninjured; I might possibly, for a day or two, look as if I had been fighting, but that would soon go off. This comfortable intelligence gave me great satisfaction; but I was unable to leave my room for the rest of the day, and saw nothing of Maria till the following morning, when we met in the hall, as I was proceeding to the breakfast-parlour. I offered my hand in token of friendship, and to show her I bore no malice: it was sullenly rejected; and furthermore, the little vixen added, she had had enough of grown-up playfellows, and uncle Egerton should never have occasion to be in a passion with her any more on my account; for she would never, *never* ask me to play at trapball or battledore again.

"Petrified with this most terrible menace, I remained immoveable, until the voice of Mr. Egerton, inquiring of

Mrs. Davenport's servant if she had seen me that morning, made me hasten to meet him, and Maria has from that day adhered to her resolution. I cannot say I have employed any very pathetic pleading for a repeal of this sentence, as I am now enabled quietly to pursue my own occupations, which I hope are rather more rational; and am no longer tormented with that most terribly-dreaded inquiry, which used to be as regular as a minute-gun, 'Now, shall we play at trapball?'

Caroline then concluded with saying, Mr. Egerton was waiting for her to ride out with him; and her friend Emily and Mr. Dorrington, who were to accompany them, were equally impatient for her appearance.

Elinor having finished reading her sister's letter, carried it down to her mother; and requesting she would allow no one else to peruse it, said she was going into the village to execute a commission for

for her father: and after cheering the hearts of a poor, but worthy family, she was returning to the parsonage, without meeting Clarenville, who, she concluded was still at Willowfield, waiting the arrival of his mother and lady Neville, who had written they might expect them on that day, when, as she reached the shrubbery, the sound of carriage-wheels struck her ear, and she soon perceived sir Edward Ormsby's rapidly approaching, and in another minute Elinor had the pleasure of embracing her friend Emma.

"Is not Mrs. Clarenville with you?" said Elinor, when the first expressions of delight at again meeting were over.

"That is a question we must ask of you," returned Emma.

"And which I can answer in the affirmative," said Clarenville, who having heard the carriage, had hastened to the gate.

Elinor heeded not the offered hand of

sir Edward, who, after giving the reins to his servant, advanced towards her, but darting past Clarenville, flew down the shrubbery, and was soon encircled in the arms of his beloved mother, who greeted her with the affectionate, endearing name of daughter; and her tears of joy mingled with those which emotion, and the most delightful feeling of gratitude, caused to flow down Elinor's blushing cheek.

"My good friend and brother Alfred," said sir Edward, as together they entered the parlour, "I must request you, though for the second time, to introduce me to Miss Belvington, who appears entirely to have forgotten such a being as myself exists."

Elinor, blushing, apologized for the rudeness she had been guilty of, but assured sir Edward, when once known, he never could be forgotten.

After affectionately and expressively pressing her hand as she advanced to meet

meet him, sir Edward said, he was glad to find her memory had not quite forsaken her, and continued—"Then I really may believe absent friends are never forgotten by you, and may also flatter myself you recalled me to your remembrance whilst wandering amidst the delightful woods of Ashgrove, or meditating in the grotto, or——"

"Or when talking with our favourite old widow," said Elinor, interrupting him. "I assure you she thinks the young *barrownight*, who so kindly went to visit her, one of the finest, noblest-looking gentlemen her eyes ever beheld; and she was also very happy to hear you were so well suited with a wife."

"I make no doubt she was very lavish in her congratulations," returned sir Edward, laughing—"And what said she to you, Clarenville? I hope she admired the famous racer?"

"My dear sir Edward," said lady Neville,

ville, now approaching, "do not forget I also have a claim to Elinor's remembrance, and that she has yet another old friend to greet."

"May we run away with you, my love?" she continued, affectionately embracing her.

Elinor shook her head, and Emma perceiving she was disinclined to accompany the party to Willowfield, said they should leave her at Rosebrook, where she intended passing the day, but begged the carriage might be sent for her in the evening.

Sir Edward promised to accompany it, and Emma next informed her brother, as she intended entirely to engross Elinor's attention that day, he had better therefore supply her place at Willowfield, and return with sir Edward in the evening; and Clarenville seeing how much his compliance would gratify his mother, consented to the plan, whilst general and

Mrs.

Mrs. Clarenville promised to become guests at the parsonage in the course of the following week.

"Why did you erase the postscript in your last letter to me?" said Elinor to her friend, as they sat conversing together, and Emma had long dwelt upon the additional happiness she should receive in becoming really the sister of her Elinor. "What did you mean," she smiling continued, "by the words—'Where my brother *now* is, I cannot determine?"

"And were you able," returned Emma, laughing, "to decipher what was unintelligible even to sir Edward, who exerted all his skill to discover it? How many hours or days did you consume in searching for that hidden knowledge?"

"Tell me first," said Elinor, "why you wished it to remain undiscovered?"

"It was in conformity to my mother's wish that I erased that sentence. I had

just finished my letter when my brother's servant arrived at Elmsly with a note from my father, to say he and his truant boy were safely landed at ——, and should most probably be at Rosebrook before this intelligence reached us. My mother then informed me of the motive which had induced my father to cross the water, as he was aware no communication by letter would reach Alfred, and said she had no expectation of seeing either of the travellers till they had succeeded in tracing the object of their search; then, if their errand proved successful, they would, she hoped, prevail on the runaway to accompany them to Elmsly.

"This, my mother, after leaving me to acquaint lady Neville with the news, returned to beg I would not hint to you; but I had already written the postscript, which I then endeavoured to render unintelligible, and flattered myself I had succeeded, as I found it was so to sir

Edward, to whom I shewed it, and who had often deciphered for me many such from Alfred. You have no cause for that suspicious look, Elinor, as I assure you I never pursued the same plan in regard to yours, though often, I acknowledge, tempted to do so."

"You would have incurred my everlasting displeasure had you done it," returned Elinor; "and if ever you suffered as much uneasiness as I have, from learning what was intended to remain concealed, your curiosity was most amply punished."

"What could you possibly fancy was concealed under those few harmless words?"

"Oh, I had a thousand ideas, all too ridiculous to mention."

"Did a foreign bride form the principal feature?" archly inquired Emma.

"I do not intend to answer any questions," replied Elinor, blushing a little; "but I have many more to ask."

"Nay,

"Nay, Elinor, this is by far too unreasonable. One answer I must insist on."

Emma was interrupted in the inquiry she was on the point of making, and the purport of which Elinor pretty well guessed, by the entrance of Mrs. Belvington; but in the course of the day lady Ormsby had the pleasure of discovering her brother's request for an early union would not be opposed by the parents of Elinor. Mrs. Belvington had assured her daughter it was her most earnest wish to see her the wife of Clarenville. "I shall then hope," she added, "if I can prevail on you to comply with our united solicitations, that I have in some degree compensated for my former cruel desertion of his father. Most mercifully have I been corrected for it, and general Clarenville, in the happiness of his son, will entirely, I trust, forgive the many years of misery I caused him."

Elinor

Elinor loved her mother too sincerely to wish, for an instant, to raise any frivolous objections; and when she found how earnestly not only her lover but general and Mrs. Clarenville desired her compliance, she only entreated for Carcline's return, that she might leave her mother a companion, and then promised to name an early day for the one Clarenville looked forward to with the most animated delight; and before his father and mother became guests at the rectory, he was on the road to town, where he hoped to conclude his law-transactions in time to return with Caroline to Rosebrook.

CHAPTER IX.

WITH the family at the rectory, in the society of their attached friends, time

now glided away, and Caroline's return was daily expected. But to Clarenville the days appeared lengthened to years, and Elinor in his absence had answered his grievous complaints, which he was in the daily habit of writing her, with long, though sportive exhortations to be patient under these irremediable misfortunes; and at the end of the third week Clarenville wrote to inform her he felt not quite so irritable as usual, having seen Caroline, who, with Mrs. Davenport, her daughter, and Mr. Egerton, was just arrived, and he had obtained permission to occupy a seat in the carriage which was to convey them down into Hampshire at the end of the ensuing week, or was to have the honour of being their charioteer, if, as he suspected would be the case, his friend Egerton preferred the snug corner offered him.

Elinor's heart beat high, and her colour varied not a little, when she put the

the letter into the hand of her mother; and not less tumultuous were its throbbings when, on the appointed day, Caroline's bounding step and animated tones struck her ear even before she appeared. In a few moments, however, Caroline sprung into her arms; she was accompanied by Mr. Egerton, who informed Mrs. Belvington the rest of his party were but a few paces behind, but Caroline's impatient speed had outstripped them, and he had therefore, at his sister's request, accompanied her, that he might, in Mrs. Davenport's name, deliver up the charge she had been entrusted with.

Mrs. Belvington, smiling, assured him these apologies for intrusion were very unnecessary; and Caroline looked not a little surprised at the heightened colour and confused manner which accompanied them.

The footsteps of the expected visitants now approaching, Caroline looked

around to observe what effect the sound would produce; but Elinor had vanished, and Clarenville, as he entered, appeared by intuition to guess where she had retreated to; for Mr. Belvington, joining his guests soon after, informed Caroline he had left her sister in his study, engaged in a most interesting *tête-à-tête*.

Mr. Egerton's hand was eagerly extended to the offered one of Mr. Belvington; and in the cordial pressure and expressive smile that followed, the former read and felt his conduct had been approved, and he had begun to hope Caroline, at some future day, would express the same.

Lady Egerton saw with pleasure the confidence established between them. Caroline applied to him for his opinion whenever her own was undecided on any topic casually introduced, and she either immediately declared it to be the same as her own, or sportively acknow-

ledged

ledged the error of the one she had unthinkingly adopted. Her spirits, which she used to confess were not at times amenable to control, now appeared, though not less gay and fascinating, more constantly under her own command; and before the day was over, she had unconsciously confessed to Elinor, that one glance of Mr. Egerton's eye was more deeply felt, she was sorry to acknowledge, than any reproof she had ever received. "Not that he likes to see me look grave, either," she continued; "no, I cannot provoke or teaze him more than by sitting with muscles as immoveable as his own sometimes are, though I really think his smiles are more frequent than when he was last at Rosebrook: do you not agree with me, Elinor?"

Elinor, laughing, assured her, that although she had not exactly counted their number, she made no doubt her observation was a just one—"For," she added,

added, with an arch smile, "when your attention is very particularly directed to any interesting point, I am perfectly convinced your judgment never fails."

Caroline blushed as she laughing inquired when her brother Willoughby intended coming to see her; then springing to the door, she exclaimed—"I hear his voice in the parlour," and in another instant she was by his side, singing, "Oh, the wonderful wisdom of fifteen!"

Mr. Willoughby, laughing, declared she had won the day; and Mr. Egerton appearing much entertained, Clarenville, tapping him on the shoulder, said —"Take care, my friend, that the secret of your heart is not too prematurely discovered. Those penetrating eyes will not long allow their owner to remain in ignorance, provided you are guilty," he laughing added, as he watched the heightening colour of his friend.

"Mr. Egerton!" exclaimed Caroline; "oh,

"oh, no! he is the last person on earth I should suspect."

Clarenville's laugh, in which he was joined by Willoughby, interrupted her, and she observed Mr. Egerton turn quickly from them, and immediately joining general Clarenville and her father, take a part in their conversation; in which, for the rest of the evening, he appeared equally interested, though Caroline soon discovered it related chiefly to persons whom the elder gentlemen had known in their youth, and to whom Mr. Egerton could not be otherwise than a perfect stranger.

When Elinor, on returning from a walk with Clarenville the following morning, entered the parlour, she was both surprised and alarmed at discovering Caroline alone and in tears. Hastily advancing towards her sister as she entered, Caroline threw her arms around her, as in extreme agitation she exclaimed—"Oh Elinor, I have just received the

the most distressing intelligence! Mrs. Davenport is obliged to leave Rosebrook immediately, for her dear mother, my own beloved lady Egerton, is dying;" and poor Caroline again burst into tears. Elinor, much grieved at this information, and unable to offer any comfort, silently embraced her weeping sister, whose tears, for some minutes, prevented her from informing Elinor, that soon after she had left the house, Mrs Davenport arrived to take a hasty farewell of her, as sir Charles had sent an express to lady Egerton's, entreating his son and daughter to return to Alborough immediately, their mother having been suddenly taken extremely ill, and the physician had pronounced her to be in great danger.

" Mrs. Davenport," continued the weeping Caroline, " begged me to say all that was kind and affectionate to you, whom she was much grieved at finding absent; but she could not wait your

return,

return, as her brother had requested her to hasten back to the cottage as soon as possible, that they might immediately commence their journey."

"Has not Mr. Egerton then," inquired Elinor, "been at the parsonage?"

"No," returned Caroline, in a mournful tone, "Mrs. Davenport would not allow him, for he was so agitated at the intelligence that she entreated him to give up the intention; for I believe," continued Caroline, "she was fearful my expressions of sorrow would, by their violence, completely overset him: but she need not have been afraid; I was too much stupified with grief to be able to utter a lamentation, or shed one tear, till after she was gone; and I really thought my heart would have broke whilst listening to the letter sir Charles had written her; and only think, dear Elinor, though in every line it was evident how deeply he felt the approaching separation

separation from his beloved wife, yet he remembered to send his most affectionate love to me, who, he said, and most truly, would be greatly concerned at the intelligence."

"And which I still trust is not so alarming as he apprehends," said Elinor. "Let us at least hope for the best; lady Egerton is subject to violent attacks, and I remember hearing lady Longbourne say her father was always more terrified than there was cause for."

"Mrs. Davenport is of the same opinion," replied Caroline; "but Mr. Egerton thinks differently, I know, or he would not have left Rosebrook without coming to the parsonage."

"But Mr. Egerton is not infallible, my dear Caroline," returned Elinor, smiling; "he may be mistaken as well as yourself; and I yet trust we shall see him and his sister again at Rosebrook before the end of another fortnight."

"Oh no, Elinor! even if lady Egerton

ton should recover, he will not return again; at any rate, Mrs. Davenport will not," continued Caroline, hastily; "and that is indeed a very serious source of sorrow to me, for I love her most sincerely; you cannot think how very kind she has been to me, and when she told me, at parting, it was probable we might not meet again for many months, my heart was too full to answer her."

The entrance of the dowager lady Egerton now interrupted the tearful Caroline, and the former addressing her with a smile, said—"I am the bearer of better tidings than my poor niece communicated this morning; a second messenger from Alborough is arrived, bringing intelligence of favourable symptoms having taken place in our dear invalid. He had met the travellers, informed them of his good news, and then hastened forward to impart it to me."

Tears of joy now prevented Caroline from speaking, and lady Egerton continued—

nued—"I confess the first intelligence did not alarm me so much as it did poor Charles, for my sister is subject to these attacks, though not perhaps so violent in general; yet sir Charles is always terrified at the first symptom of danger; and between ourselves, Dr. N——, who attends his family, is too apt to express his fears for the life of a patient a little too prematurely. Be comforted then, my dear Caroline," continued lady Egerton, affectionately kissing her; "in a few days we shall hear our beloved invalid is pronounced convalescent, and in a few more Charles and Maria will return to Rosebrook."

"Return to Rosebrook!" exclaimed Caroline, her dark eyes once more sparkling with delight; "how much I feared I should not see them again! that is, I mean, Mrs. Davenport, for a very long time."

"Mrs. Davenport will not be able to refuse any request of her brother's," returned

turned lady Egerton, smiling; "if he wishes to see Rosebrook again, and entreats his sister to accompany him, she will not, I think, deny him; and as I flatter myself Charles is become very partial to his old aunt, I fully expect to see my young relatives again."

Mr. Belvington and Clarenville now entered the room: the former had seen Mrs. Davenport, and having heard from her the apprehended danger of her mother, was on the point of expressing his sincere concern to lady Egerton, when she interrupted him by repeating the account she had last received.

The gentlemen both assured her it gave them the sincerest pleasure to hear it; and Clarenville finding lady Egerton intended walking to Willowfield, entreated permission to be her escort, which being readily given, they soon departed, leaving the now-smiling Caroline to inquire of her sister the cause of that unusually-deep suffusion Clarenville's

ville's request had produced; and at length she brought Elinor to confess it was occasioned by recollecting the promise she had that morning given Clarenville, of fixing an early day in the ensuing week for their union, and she was aware he wished to impart the intelligence to lady Egerton.

Caroline's every thought was now given to her sister, whose spirits she would not allow to feel depressed, when, as she assured her, they ought to be more elevated than usual. "You are not going abroad, Elinor," she added; "therefore the parting from your family will not be so very tremendous. It is I who have most reason to dread the separation; you will have a companion in your exile, but I shall be left *solus*, and echo alone will answer to my lamentations. Were I to complain to Cecilia, she would not understand me, having never experienced the loss of a friend in a sister; for she very wisely sat down for life in the

midst

midst of our circle. Henrietta would still less comprehend me; she would say, 'Elinor is so greatly your senior in age, that she cannot have been much of a companion to you. Go up into the nursery; you will find plenty of playfellows there.' Now, am I not to be the most pitied, Elinor? only consider how very mortifying such a plan of comfort would be to one who, for the last six weeks, has been taught to regard herself as a suitable companion to——"

"Sir Henry Longbourne?" archly inquired Elinor.

"No, Elinor," returned Caroline, laughing; "I was not thinking of that foolish affair. It was his aunt, my dear Mrs. Davenport, I was going to mention."

"Indeed!" said Elinor, in so incredulous a tone that Caroline started from her seat, and seeing Mr. Coleridge approaching the house, ran out to meet him,

him, whilst Elinor retired to her mother's apartment.

In a few days letters were received from Alborough, containing most satisfactory accounts of the invalid; and Mrs. Davenport, in one she wrote Caroline, expressed her hopes of seeing Hampshire again ere another month had elapsed. But it did not escape the observation of her correspondent, that Mr. Egerton's name was not mentioned, nor any hint thrown out by his sister of her having a companion with her on her journey.

Elinor remarked the unusual absence of mind Caroline betrayed after perusing this letter; and Clarenville, more than once, rallied her on her gravity.

"I am sorry to perceive, Caroline," said Elinor, laughing, "that the cave of Trophonius, from whence you brought a letter, has infected even you. *We all saw you enter that room with a light step*

and

and smiling countenance, but, in the course of a quarter of an hour, what a change appeared!"

"Elinor," said Caroline, laughing, but colouring highly, "I think a visit to that famous cave would be of use to you. I wish, Clarenville, you would take another trip to the Continent; I am sure it would greatly improve Elinor; she will be quite a different creature when you come back."

"If that is likely to be the case," returned Clarenville, laughing, "I had better remain in old England, as I wish not for the slightest change."

"Oh! now I am gone," cried Caroline; "when once you begin those sort of speeches I shall leave you: so adieu;" and glad to escape, she retreated as quickly as possible from the room.

The day so long impatiently expected by Clarenville at length arrived, when he received his beloved Elinor from the hand of her revered father. Her brother

Willoughby performed the ceremony; and after their return to the parsonage he approached his favourite Caroline, as she was conversing with Clarenville and his still-agitated Elinor, and exclaimed, as he sportively saluted the youthful bridemaid—"When will you, Caroline, allow me the honour Elinor has this morning conferred on me?"

Caroline's colour heightened, but, after a moment's hesitation, she laughingly replied—"When brother Coleridge presents the next living in his gift to a second Willoughby; for not till then, as Elinor used to say, will I marry."

"And you will keep that resolution, I am perfectly convinced, as long as she has done," returned her brother, laughing.

"Unless I meet with a second Clarenville, which is not likely to happen, if, as Elinor says, there is not his equal to be found on this earth."

"My assertion was not quite so strong,

strong, Caroline," said Elinor, smiling; "it was his *superior* I challenged you to name: and even, for that expression, recollect the provocation you gave me."

"Oh, tell me, dearest Elinor," cried Clarenville, eagerly, "what it was our saucy sister said? Did she bring any one forward as my competitor? and who was the happy man?"

"Lord Mowbray, certainly," exclaimed Caroline, hastily, the colour again mounting to her cheek; "and I merely said, that, in my opinion, he was much handsomer, full as amiable, and far more sensible, than the comparatively poor, untitled Clarenville; and," she continued, archly glancing towards her sister, "he assuredly was your equal in discerning every excellence in our sex."

"Indeed!" cried Clarenville, starting in surprise, as he immediately comprehended her meaning, which was confirmed by the blushing countenance of his lovely bride, "I was not aware how

much higher his lordship deserved to rank in my estimation."

"What," exclaimed Caroline, laughing, "has not Elinor informed you, as I particularly desired she would, of the confidence his noble lordship reposed in Mr. Egerton, he in me, and I in my equally-prudent sister? If she really has not followed the excellent advice I gave her, you must give me leave to observe, she has shown herself most miserably deficient in judgment."

A summons to breakfast now interrupted Caroline; and ere the meal had concluded, her spirits had almost entirely forsaken her; and when the moment for parting arrived, she could no longer restrain her tears, and retreated to her father's study, unable to bid her beloved Elinor farewell.

Mr. and Mrs. Belvington exerted all their fortitude to bear the separation from their darling child with apparent calmness; while sir Edward and Willoughby,

loughby, by their lively remarks, endeavoured to throw a cheering ray over the *finale*.

CHAPTER X.

Elinor, in becoming the wife of her beloved Clarenville, gratefully acknowledged she had attained the summit of her earthly felicity, whilst each succeeding day more firmly cemented the regard he had so long cherished; and their respective parents, when they visited Woodley at the expiration of a few weeks, beheld, with delight, the happiness which the union of their children had produced.

Caroline, at the request of lady Egerton, did not accompany the party from Rosebrook, but remained, not very unwillingly, her companion until Mrs. Davenport

venport returned, who was expected to arrive before the Belvingtons came back into Hampshire; and after her niece had left her, lady Egerton promised Elinor to visit Devonshire, accompanied by Caroline, sir Edward and lady Ormsby, and little Edward Coleridge, who was also to join the party.

Mr. and Mrs. Belvington remained at Woodley until the approach of Christmas summoned them to return home, as the parishioners were at that period accustomed to receive the benefactions of their beloved rector and his son-in-law, Mr. Coleridge; and the anniversary of that sacred festival was ever looked forward to with delight by those who had the happiness of relieving the wants and cheering the hearts of their poorer fellow-creatures.

Clarenville assured Mrs. Belvington at parting he would take his Elinor to Rosebrook early in the spring; after that she had promised lady Ormsby to

pass

pass some time with her at Elmsly Park, Emma having acknowledged she should not be able to leave home at that time.

Mr. Montague had galloped down to Woodley, though against his wife's consent, who could not forgive Elinor for marrying so well, and being now equal, if not superior to herself, in point of fortune as well as rank; and in the most cordial manner congratulated his young friends on the happiness they appeared to enjoy, and sportively informed them it was his intention to advertise in the papers the grotto he possessed, as an elegant, retired, and convenient spot for lovers to repeat their soft and tender tales in; and he doubted not, the intelligence, when circulated, would draw thousands of Cupid's votaries to the place, and Mrs. Montague would no longer have cause to complain of its dulness. "I shall insist on Caroline's visiting

visiting Ashgrove next summer," he added; "and take my word for it, she will be for changing her name before the season is over."

Elinor, laughing, thanked him, in the name of her sister, for his promised kindness, and assured him she should be acquainted with the happiness that was in store for her; and Mr. Montague, as he bade his favourite farewell, again desired her to cheer Caroline's heart by the information.

Clarenville received a letter from him a few days after his departure, and having a message to deliver Elinor from her cousin (who informed him Miss Benfield had declined the offer of his grotto, as she had found in her father's little study that happiness which Elinor had met with in the temple of Cupid, as he had named the cave), Clarenville sought his beloved wife in her dressing-room, where she welcomed him with a smile: but

but he perceived the traces of tears yet on her cheek, and anxiously inquired the cause.

"They are tears of joy only," said Elinor, again smiling, "occasioned by a letter from our dear Caroline. She has candidly informed me of her regard to our friend Egerton, which he has also, by his persuasions, induced her to acknowledge she had long felt for him."

"And when did this happy eclaircissement take place?" inquired Clarenville, after expressing the pleasure this intelligence gave him. "Has Egerton been long returned to Rosebrook?"

"No, he was detained at Alborough longer than he had expected by lady Egerton's precarious state of health; and had not Mrs. Davenport informed her mother of the attraction Rosebrook possessed, it is probable she would not have parted from him even now. Lady Egerton's anxiety for her son's happiness then prevailed over all selfish considerations,

ations, and she entreated Mrs. Davenport to hasten with her brother to Rosebrook, and, if possible, prevail upon Caroline to return with them to Alborough.

"I am now," continued Elinor, smiling, "giving you the information which the postscript of this letter contains, written by my mother: that I received from Caroline, I will, by the request of the former, read to you; I mean that part which relates to Mr. Egerton."

"I was sitting alone in the parlour the other morning, my thoughts deeply engaged upon my absent sister, when a gentle tap at the door aroused me; and snapping short the thread of my meditations, caused me, a little pettishly, to desire the intruder to enter.

"The door slowly opened, but no one was to be seen; surprised, and not a little curious to discover the cause of this non-

non-appearance, I threw down my work and advanced to the entrance, where I perceived—the Torpedo!

"Struck dumb with astonishment, I remained rooted to the spot, and recovered not my senses till I heard the voice of his sister, Mrs. Davenport, in the hall, speaking to my mother. I would then have sprung forwards to meet her, but the ill-natured little animal would not allow me; he caught my hand, and as I still struggled to release myself, maliciously closed the door, and entreated to know if I still retained the same shrinking sensations and alarms his first appearance in that room had created?

"Now the little animal knows too well any allusion to that subject takes from me all power of answering, and I always stand like a culprit before him; and here let me observe, I certainly am possessed of a most forgiving disposition, or I never could have brought myself to feel any regard for your wicked *cara*

sposo,

sposo, Elinor, as he was the direct cause of all my foolish conduct towards Mr. Egerton that morning.

"I really do think the man almost enjoys the confusion this subject ever produces; at least, he took advantage of it the other day, for before I could sufficiently recover myself to laugh off the charge, he proceeded to inquire if no alteration in his manner could efface the remembrance of it from my mind? and whether I could, if not at present, yet some little time hence transfer a portion of the regard I felt for his sister to himself? A very modest request, was it not, Elinor? yet modest as it was, and diffident as was the tone in which it was asked, I was cruel enough to deny granting it. In the next moment, Elinor, you would have supposed we had changed natures, or that I had taken on me that of the Torpedo; for the electric shock my answer gave struck to every fibre, nerve, blood-vessel, and artery of his gigantic frame.

"And

"And now I might, in my turn, have enjoyed the effect I had produced, but my too-soft disposition inclined me to feel pity alone; and willing to relieve him, I courageously continued—'Have you forgotten, Mr. Egerton, you are speaking to the playfellow of your niece, Maria Davenport, who was only fifteen last April? and can you expect, in her, to find a companion, a friend, and adviser?' My lecture on this strange folly would have continued much longer, had it not been interrupted by a long string of expressions, such, I make no doubt, as Clarenville has often repeated to you, accompanied with the novel assurance of my being superior to the rest of my sex, with not a few gentle reproaches for my mentioning his foolish niece in comparison with myself; and all these confused, multiplied, and overwhelming expressions, succeeded so completely in overpowering my better reason, that at length, without giving myself time for reflection, I withdrew my negative,

and

and consented to take upon me, some dozen years hence, the title of—*Torpedoess.*

"In a few minutes after this involuntary and wholly-unintended affirmative had escaped me, (and which was of rather more importance than the similar mistake I made between the affirmative and negative, when he asked me to dance at S——), I was left to mourn in solitude the ridiculous error I had been guilty of; but fortunately for the preservation of my reason Mrs. Davenport quickly joined me; and although I at first shed the most bitter tears of repentance on her bosom, yet my kind friend's soothing, cheering, and affectionate expressions of regard, soon enabled me to restrain them; and when she proceeded to inform me it was by the full concurrence of my father, and the cordial approbation of hers, that the subject had been mentioned to me, I acknowledge, my dear Elinor, the tears I then shed were those of sincere delight. Yet still

I conti-

I continued repeating to my kind friend, it was impossible all that had passed was otherwise than a dream; but when my father entered with Mr. Egerton, who had left me to seek him, and sanctioned the reply I had given the latter, by his assurances of its securing my happiness, I began to hope I was awake, particularly as I distinctly heard my dear father inform Mr. Egerton, the present childish Caroline must have one, if not two years allowed her to reap wisdom in, before she left the roof of her parents, to take on herself the important duties of a matron.

"This decree was earnestly, though vainly, entreated to be set aside. I assured the brother and sister it had my entire approbation, and requested them to drop the argument. My eloquence prevailed; but I was obliged to bind myself to accompany Mrs. Davenport when she leaves Rosebrook for Albo-rough, which however is not to be till I have again embraced my beloved Elinor

at

at Woodley, where sir Edward and lady Ormsby, with our little nephew Edward and myself, hope to arrive in the course of the following week.

"Brother Willoughby is a torment I shall be glad to escape, and I trust your influence will be effectually exerted with brother Clarenville to prevent his being equally disagreeable.

"My mother writes to you by the same convenient frank sir Edward has procured me: he is full as provoking as Willoughby, for he offered me the envelope last night without my asking for it, gravely assuring me a letter of such mighty consequence as my next would be, deserved to reach you in an honourable style.

"My task is now finished, and I most joyfully conclude with confessing the contents of this letter would never have been written by me, had not my dear mother, to whom I can refuse nothing, entreated I would communicate them to you, though I repeatedly assured her

you

you would immediately inform Clarenville of them.

"This, she says, will be done at any rate, even if she were to write herself; and therefore advises me to adopt at once a candid and unreserved conduct towards my beloved sister, from whom I have experienced the most affectionate regard, and a confidence and friendship which few elder sisters would grant to a junior, who had, from her infancy, been their torment."

"If any one deserves the sister of my Elinor," said Clarenville, "it is my friend Egerton; and in Caroline alone will he find the woman calculated to make him happy; for she has had for her monitress, companion, and friend, my own beloved wife, who has, by her example, shown her the road leading to perfection."

"Dearest Alfred," said Elinor, throwing herself into her husband's arms, "your

"your approbation and regard will ever be most highly prized by the partner of your bosom; and never, I trust, will they be withdrawn from her"

Clarenville tenderly pressed his beloved Elinor to his heart, as he replied—"Your Alfred can never feel otherwise than most truly grateful for the treasure he possesses."

"Clarenville," said Elinor, raising her head from his bosom, and smiling affectionately, as her eyes, beaming with the truest delight, met his, "what would our dashing relation, Mrs. Montague, say to your unfashionable *tendresse*?"

"She cannot, at least, *think* otherwise," he in an animated tone replied, "than that Alfred Clarenville esteems himself the happiest of men, in being the beloved husband of Elinor, her unfashionable relation."

THE END.

Printed by J. Darling, Leadenhall-Street, London.